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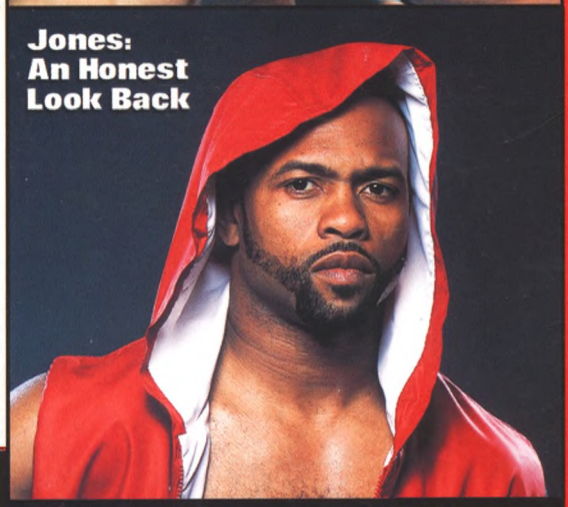

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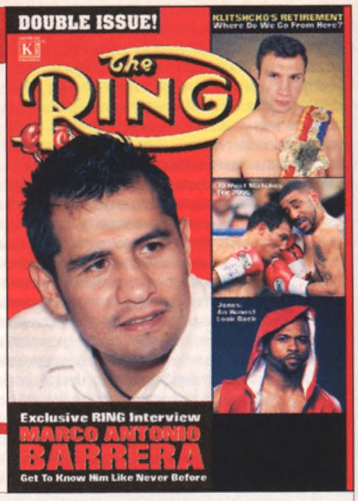

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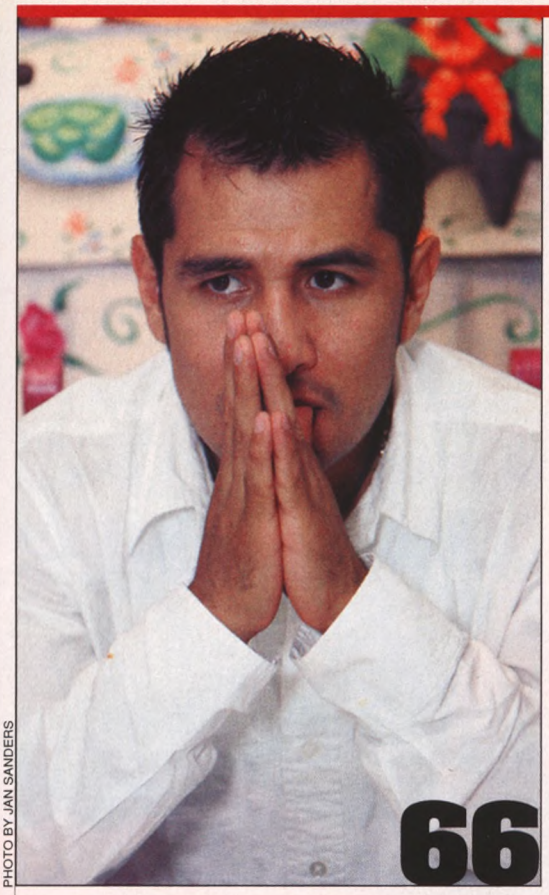

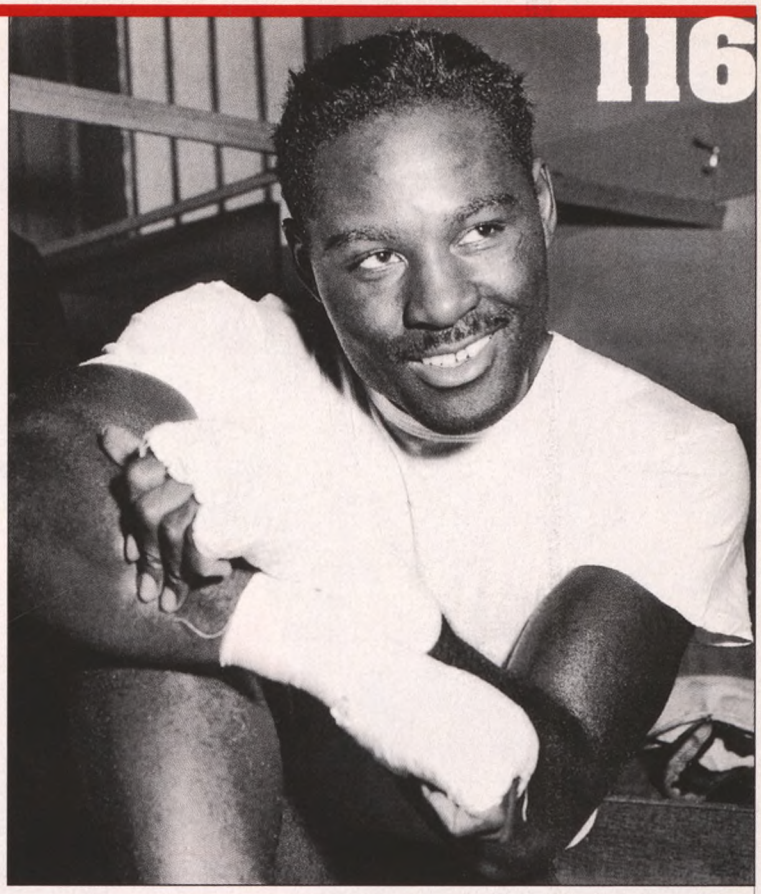

PHOTO BY JAN SANDERS

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PHOTO BY MARTIN ROSE/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

[Opening Shot]

Yes, even his ear ...

We don't have an "after" photo to show you here, but rest assured that after Thomas Ulrich took this right from WBC light heavyweight titlist Tomasz Adamek during their fight in Dusseldorf, Germany, all of his facial features ended up pretty much where they were before the punch was thrown.

[Ringside]

Sometimes you don't know if something is good or bad, especially at first. Most of the time you figure it out eventually, but every now and then something happens—or doesn't, as is the case here—and you're never quite sure what to think.

That's how I feel about the House of Representatives voting 233-190 against creating a U.S. Boxing Commission within the Commerce Department. I know a lot of people had high hopes for a federal boxing commission, and maybe they were right, but I've never been able to fully embrace the concept. The thought of politicians running boxing always gave me a queasy feeling deep inside. And don't for a moment think that the vote that killed the bill had anything to do with boxing. It was all about politics, just a minor skirmish in an eternal power struggle that makes boxing look like a kiddies' game.

But who knows? Maybe a federal commission could have helped. I don't think even the bill's strongest supporters thought it would be an instant panacea for all of boxing's ills. I guess it all depends on what you expect, but when something is as screwed up as the boxing business is, a little relief can go a long way.

Regardless of how you feel about the issue, the bottom line is that a federal boxing commission is dead, at least for the time being, and boxing will be left to its own devices.

The crazy thing is we have it within our own power to reform without any outside help. But the sad truth is that many of the most powerful people in the industry don't want more government oversight, regardless of what they say publicly—and not for the same reasons I have serious doubts. Sure, they scream bloody murder when things don't go their way, but the last thing they want is a level playing field, because they know that next time they might be able to manipulate things to their advantage.

So where does that leave the fans, the people like you who ultimately pay the bills? I've often written about the power of the consumer, and that power is still the best weapon we have, but there's a delicious Catch-22 at work here. If consumers withhold too much of their support, boxing will disappear, and that's not what we want either.

At some level, most of us who love the Sweet Science understand that in order to be a boxing fan you have to make a silent deal with the dark side. After all, for all it's nobility, boxing is about hurting one another, and once we make that deal with ourselves, we've got to understand that it comes with a price. Maybe the way boxing disappoints and infuriates us is really just part of the penance we pay for loving it in the first place.

◆◆◆

I don't know if Vitali Klitschko will ever fight again, but even if he does, he's never going to rank among the great heavyweight champions. Still, "Dr. Iron Fist" was around long enough for us to get to know him a bit, and I think he would have been good for boxing if things had worked out differently. There's a letter from reader Wayne Matthews in this issue's "Come Out Writing" *(page 128)* that says a lot about the sort of man Vitali is, but I won't steal Mr. Matthews' thunder. Read his letter yourself. It's suffice to say that whatever shortcomings Vitali had as a fighter are more than compensated by his quality as a man.

Nigel Collins
Editor-in-Chief

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Agapito Sanchez, 1970-2005

Former WBO super bantamweight titleholder Agapito "El Ciclon" Sanchez, 35, was shot to death in his homeland of Dominican Republic. Witnesses said the boxer was playing a game of dominoes on November 13 with friends at a local bar called Banana, near his home in Santo Domingo, when Diogeues Nova Rosario, a sergeant in the Dominican Air Force, approached and asked the boxer if he could dance with his girlfriend. When Sanchez refused, Rosario allegedly pulled a gun and opened fire. In the ensuing chaos, Rosario was chased and badly beaten by the boxer's friends.

Sanchez, who received wounds to his abdomen, was taken to hospital and underwent surgery, only to die two days later. His funeral was attended by many public figures, including the sports minister.

Rosario is currently under arrest at a military hospital, where he had gone to seek treatment. Sanchez' family said they will campaign to ensure justice is done when the case comes to court.

Sanchez, who turned pro in November 1989, won five of his final six bouts, including a one-punch kayo of Art Simonyan on ESPN2 in July 2005. His final bout was on September 9, 2005, when he won a 10-round decision over Edinso Torres in Santo Domingo. He is probably best remembered by U.S. fans for his foul-filled brawl with Manny Pacquiao in 2001 that ended in a technical draw when Pacquiao's right eye was cut by an accidental headbutt. Sanchez was penalized two points for low blows in that fight.

Known for his awkward, rough-and-tumble style, the sturdy Sanchez fought many of the top featherweights and junior bantamweights during his 36-11-3 (18) career, including Marco Antonio Barrera (L 12), Juan Manuel Marquez (L 12), Freddie Norwood (L 12), Joan Guzman (KO by 7), and Pacquiao. His best wins came over Oscar Larios (KO 5), Jorge Eliecer Monsalvo (KO 7), Javier Jaurequi (W 10), and Simonyan.

Although Sanchez was beloved by the boxing-mad Dominicans, his reputation as a dirty fighter tended to overshadow his admirable qualities. People forget that he turned pro as a flyweight and was generally smaller than his rivals. Sanchez was also fearless and cunning, a genuine tough guy who was still holding his own with the best at an age most fighters his size were washed-up or retired.

PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

PHOTO BY WALTER DOMINGO/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Evarista Sanchez mourns the death of her brother, former WBO super bantam titlist Agapito Sanchez (inset)

More Tyson Trouble

PHOTO CORTESY OF CANAL 13

Tyson and TV host Maradona ham it up for the cameras

Mike Tyson's world tour touched down in South America just long enough for the globe-trekking ex-champ to get arrested. Things began well enough in Argentina, where Iron Mike was a special guest of Diego Maradona on the TV program *La Noche Del Diez*. Luna Park in Buenos Aries was transformed into a television studio for the occasion, and Tyson chatted with the former soccer star-turned-TV personality in front of a live audience of 4,500 and approximately 3.1 million viewers.

During the show the erstwhile baddest man on the planet proclaimed his admiration for Argentina's Carlos Monzon and his hate for journalists. He also told Maradona that they shared common roots and that he had visited "Villa Miseria," Buenos Aries' poverty stricken neighborhood, earlier that day.

Tyson is well-aware of Argentina's rich boxing heritage, and in a private conversation with your correspondent, he spoke of Luis Angel Firpo, Pascual Perez, and Gustavo Ballas. Tyson also demonstrated how he had used a defense similar to Monzon's. The conversation, however, went beyond boxing, and Tyson also talked about Argentine freedom fighter Che Guevara, whose likeness is tattooed on his body.

"Che was so fragile physically, but so strong internally," said Tyson. "Like me, he suffered from asthma when he was a child. He was also close to the poor people, like me. He was a giant."

Tyson doesn't like to talk about his boxing career, and to make this clear he pointed to a copy of a boxing magazine with his picture on the cover and said: "The Tyson you see here is the past. I am a new man now. I am free."

Tyson also had some interesting things to say about his relationship with his homeland and his bad-boy image.

"In America, people look for money and forget elemental things such as the family," he said. "I don't like living in America, and I don't like to be a bad man. But remember, Jesus Christ, in His time, was the bad man because he was against the political system."

Things stared to go badly the night following Tyson's appearance on *La Noche Del Diez*. By then he had moved on to Brazil, where he had problems with a cameraman at a disco named Bahamas in San Paulo. Tyson had asked that there be no video, and when journalist Carlos Melo continued taping, Tyson destroyed his camera. An hour later at another disco, two policemen arrived, took Tyson into custody, and then to the local precinct.

"There was no personal damage [to the cameraman]," said police officer Roberto Calassa. "But he did destroy a camera, and that is not correct."

Tyson was released a couple of hours after his arrest, but must return in March. Most likely he will be sentenced to some sort of community service.

Trouble continued to haunt Tyson after he left South America and traveled to England for a series speaking engagements. According to cnn.com, a crowd of approximately 500 (paying $200 each) turned out at the Heritage Hotel in Derby for the black-tie function, where Tyson appeared with former foe Frank Bruno. Both men answered questions from the audience and then left.

Shortly thereafter, an altercation broke out during an auction of Tyson-related memorabilia. Around 20 people were involved in the brawl in which chairs were hurled, tables tipped over, glasses smashed, and punches thrown. Debyshire Police said one person was taken to the hospital, after being hit over the head with a champagne bottle. As the ruckus had ended by time the police arrived, there were no immediate arrests, but police launched an appeal for witnesses.

—Carlos Irusta

Boxing Bookshelf

Most true boxing fans are aware of the famous heavyweight title bout between Joe Louis and Max Schmeling that took place on June 22, 1938. Due to the international scene at the time, with the world on the precipice of a second "war to end all wars," the Yankee Stadium fight was not just a sporting event, but a happening with political and racial overtones. More than a few boxing books have recounted the circumstances surrounding the match, such as Patrick Myler's recent *Ring Of Hate*, but Lewis A. Erenberg's *The Greatest Fight Of Our Generation* ($28.00, 265 pages, Oxford University Press) is one of the best of the genre.

Author Erenberg is a history professor at Loyola University of Chicago, and his scholarly approach to the subject matter plays well without being heavy-handed. Erenberg covers the lives and careers of both Louis and Schmeling from start to finish, giving the reader a thorough understanding of how what transpired in their worlds helped shape the character of the rematch, and how the two lives were affected afterward due to the contest's result.

Along the way, Erenberg enlightens us with interesting insights into the relationships between Louis, black America, and U.S. society as a whole. He also gives Schmeling equal time, educating us on Schmeling's involuntary association with the Third Reich, and how "The Black Uhlan" was merely a pawn in Hitler's propaganda game, to be used and summarily cast away when no longer considered a political asset.

The second Louis-Schmeling bout, juxtaposed with the coming threat of world war, was a time many people who lived through both will never forget. And while Erenberg's claim that it was the greatest fight of our generation can still be debated, he nonetheless does an excellent job of describing its importance. It was the right fight for its time, and *The Greatest Fight Of Our Generation* will be an important addition to any boxing fan's library. It is available in most major bookstores, and can also be purchased by calling Oxford University Press at 212-726-6000 or by e-mail at www.oup.com/us.

—Mike Greenhill

We're reluctant to say anything bad about *Kings Of The Ring, The History Of Heavyweight Boxing* (The Orion Publishing Group, 228 pages, £20.00, hardcover), an ambitious new book that would make a nice gift for any boxing fan. The book is nicely packaged with text provided by noted boxing writer Gavin Evans. Still, there's something uneven about it. It's understandable that Muhammad Ali was given more pages than any other champion, but history buffs will wonder why Hasim Rahman gets three pages and Max Baer gets only one, or why Vitali Klitschko rates as many pages as Joe Louis.

There are also a surprising number of errors in the book. They aren't huge—Buster Douglas finished Mike Tyson with a left, not a right, for example—but they seem odd in a book of this magnitude. We suspect some of the gaffs come from relying too much on that vast resource of wrong information: the Internet.

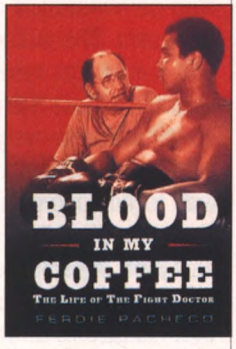
The photographs are beautiful and rare, particularly an artsy shot of Primo Carnera giving a fascist salute, but there should have been more of them. The book is a bit dry and stodgy, as if the publishers, in order to produce something tasteful, sacrificed some of boxing's unique color. This is odd because the book's ad campaign practically shouts about the number of rapists and criminals who have held the heavyweight crown.

Still, *Kings Of The Ring* was a massive undertaking, and it's better than most books in the genre. It falls short only because it reached so high. A volume covering the middleweight champs would be a welcome follow-up.

—Don Stradley

The blood-and-guts crowd that derided Ferdie Pacheco for using his TV bully pulpit to berate referees who didn't stop fights when Pacheco thought they should will gag on *Blood In My Coffee: The Life Of The Fight Doctor* (Sports Publishing LLC, 250 pages, hardcover, $24.95). So will certain boxing writers, Pacheco's broadcast partner Marv Albert, and others with and for whom Pacheco worked as a boxing analyst at NBC and Showtime, the dwindling membership of the Howard Cosell Fan Club, and the even fewer devotees of the theory that you catch more flies with honey than vinegar.

Pacheco reserves most of his sweet talk for himself, his family, Budd Schulberg, and some other famous pals—and, of course, Muhammad Ali ("God's chosen child"), without whom the author would not be, as Pacheco coyly and somewhat disingenuously states right up front, "almost famous." Just about everybody else seems to be an idiot, knave, or fool for disagreeing with "The Fight Doctor," thwarting his creativity and crusade to "change things in boxing," or failing to appreciate his insights, accomplishments, artwork, screenplays, manuscripts, and everything else that, according to Pacheco, has made him a symbol of our time and culture.



Don't get me wrong. His book is entertaining, readable, and even, on such matters as women's boxing, George Foreman, and fighters who have no business being in the ring anymore, worth a hearty "Amen"! The anecdotes about fighters, including 1980s contenders James Scott and Frank "The Animal" Fletcher (both staples of NBC's *Sports-*

world when Pacheco was doing both the booking and ringside commentary), are amusing enough, and Pacheco's reminiscences about the intellectual Lilliputians he encountered in the "land of network nitwits" are instructive.

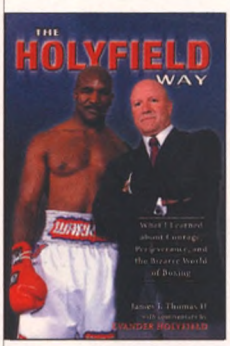
I'm not even outraged when Pacheco calls boxing "brutal (and) primitive, and in this day and age should probably be banned," and his own involvement in the sport a possible "character flaw." Every thinking fan I know harbors guilty misgivings.

But lance that ego, Doc. When Pacheco declares that boxing "became more humane" after he "came blasting into the picture with a microphone and direct scathing criticisms of insanely bolder referees," it's downright Cosellian.

The Fight Doctor has lived an interesting and laudable life, but ought to pay more attention to his estimable father's fifth rule to live by: "Never do a good deed and brag about it. Otherwise, you haven't done a damn thing but something for yourself."

—Pete Ehrmann

Somebody should send a copy of *The Holyfield Way: What I Learned About Courage, Perseverance, And The Bizarre World Of Boxing* (Sports Publishing LLC, 250 pages, hardcover, $24.95) to those Jesuit magazine editors who editorialized against boxing last fall. After reading it, they might withdraw their objection to the sport on the grounds that, for all its evils, boxing has produced a true candidate for sainthood.



Author James J. Thomas II spent many years as Evander Holyfield's "attorney, boxing management advisor, friend, and confidant," and just about everything one needs to know about the gospel according to Thomas comes in his disclosure that heading into his initial meeting with Holyfield, "I had no idea he would become one of the most important, and inspiring, people in my life. I expected to respect and admire Evander, but I never expected to feel as close to and as protective of him as I became over the coming years."

Thus freed of any obligation to or pretense of objectivity (as if the title hadn't already telegraphed that), Thomas goes on to demonstrate that the world inhabited by Holyfield and his true believers is pretty bizarre in its own right. How else to explain Thomas himself taking Holyfield aside before the first Mike Tyson fight to share the mystical vision he'd had of Holyfield's kayo victory, and his statement that in the dressing room before the fight "Maybe I was lightheaded from the excitement, but everyone seemed to be floating a bit, and there was a strange pink aura in the room."

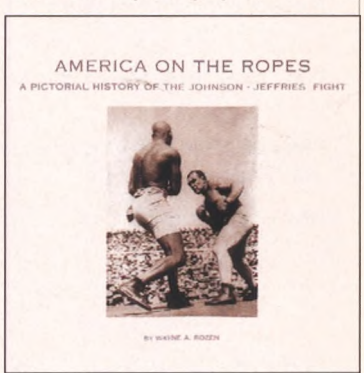
Thomas' portrait of St. Evander is relentlessly heavy-handed ("I have been fortunate enough to spend time with many of Evander's celebrity friends, and almost without exception I have been pleasantly surprised by their warmth and sincerity. I assume not all celebrities are so genuine, but the ones who are Evander's friends truly are." ... "Evander would start his morning workouts at 5 a.m. so that he could finish in time to join his children at the breakfast table and then take them to school. It was touching to watch the warrior make the transition in a matter of minutes from throwing punches to making sure the kids had everything they needed for school."). Even one predisposed to admire Holyfield for his unquestioned courage and heroic career may end up, by the end of this book, a screaming agnostic on the whole subject.

—Pete Ehrmann

Lately, it seems that as soon as one book is published about a certain boxer, at least one more is sure to follow. There have been several about the Joe Louis-Max Schmeling rivalry, two or three about Jim Braddock, and now, following closely on the heels of Geoffrey C. Ward's *Unforgivable Blackness*, a new volume about Jack Johnson. The latest Johnson-related book is *America On The Ropes: A Pictorial History Of The Johnson-Jeffries Fight* (Casey Press LLC, $70, 323 pages, hardbound) by Wayne A. Rosen.

What separates Rosen's tome from other books on the same subject is its massive 14½" x 11½" format and the amazing collection of photographs, illustrations, cartoons, and documents it contains. Not only are there rare photos of virtually everybody and everything connected to Johnson and Jeffries, there are also photocopies of Johnson's fingerprints and other official papers related to his incarceration in Leavenworth prison, and reproductions of periodical and sheet music covers, tickets, and postcards. There's even a series of 21 *Mutt And Jeff* comic strips detailing the wacky duo's trip to see the big fight.

But *America On The Ropes* is more than a stunning visual experience. Rosen details all aspects leading up to the fight, the fight itself, and the aftermath in clean, precise prose. But more than anything else, the book is a scathing indictment of American racism in the first decade of the 20th century. And perhaps even more than the words and photographs, it is the illustrations and cartoons that speak the loudest. Black characters, especially Johnson, look like they've just stepped out of a blackface minstrel show. One particularly offensive cartoon shows a big-lipped Johnson munching on giant slice of—you guessed it—watermelon. Then there's the cartoon headlined, "Cheer Up, White Folks, It Might Be Worse!" that features black athletes as the champions of wrestling, track, baseball, football, golf, and tennis. Cartoonist F. Fox didn't know it at the time, but he was actually predicting the future.



With such a steep price tag, *America On The Ropes* is not for all boxing fans. But for those who can afford it, Rosen's book comes highly recommended.

—Nigel Collins

TV Fights of the Month

DATE	WINNER/LOSER	NETWORK	DIVISION	SIGNIFICANCE	MATCHUP	RESULT
10/21/05	Vernon Forrest KO 10 Elco Garcia	FOX SN	jm	C+	C-	C
Yes, you're supposed to protect yourself at all times, but how about at least giving the guy a count, ref?						
10/21/05	Yuri Foreman W 10 Troy Lowry	PPV	jm	C+	D+	C
Come on, admit it: It's weird seeing a white guy box and move as well as Foreman does						
10/21/05	Zuri Lawrence W 10 Jameel McCline	PPV	h	C	C	D
The thing that's so fascinating about McCline is he really, really wants to be good; poor bastard						
10/21/05	Edison Miranda KO 3 Sherwin Davis	PPV	m	C	C+	C
As much as we love bodypunchers, it's actually kind of boring when a bodyshot ends a fight, isn't it?						
10/21/05	David Tua W 10 Cisse Salif	PPV	h	C+	C-	C-
Hey if Tua can get into decent shape, who wouldn't want to see him around the top of the division again?						
10/21/05	Mario Santiago KO 5 Cornelius Lock	Showtime	f	C+	A-	B+
After a slow start, Santiago really turned it on; the kid might have something						
10/21/05	Agnaldo Nunez W 10 Adalberto Borquez	Showtime	jl	C	A	C+
This looked better on paper than it turned out to be; Nunez is at a higher level						
10/21/05	Rocky Martinez W 10 Jose Luis Soto Karass	Telefutura	jw	C+	B	C+
This might have been a bit closer than the judges had it, but good win for bloodied-up Martinez anyway						
10/21/05	Juan Rodriguez KO 9 Wilfredo Negron	Telefutura	jw	C	B-	B+
Upset! No matter how many losses a guy has, if he's got 50 wins you can't look past him						
10/28/05	Antonio Escalante KO 3 Trinidad Mendoza	Telefutura	jf	C	D-	D
This one could have been stopped during the prefight instructions; a mismatch from the opening bell						
10/28/05	Tomas Villa KO 9 Cuauhtemoc Vargas	Telefutura	jf	C+	B-	B+
Villa making a habit of knocking off undefeated prospects; good for him						
10/29/05	Hugo Cazarez KO 6 Kaicho Sor Vorapin	HBO-L	jfl	B-	B	B+
Cazarez gets off the canvas to starch Sor Vorapin in wild slugfest						
10/29/05	Daniel Ponce DeLeon W 12 Sod Looknongyangtoy	HBO-L	jf	B	B+	C+
Ponce DeLeon has the slowest hands we've ever seen on a junior featherweight						
10/29/05	Jhonny Gonzalez KO 7 Ratanachai Vor Sorapin	HBO-L	b	B+	B+	B
Gonzalez stole the show on this card, and not by a little; the guy can fight						
10/29/05	Fernando Montiel W 12 Pramuansak Phosawan	HBO-L	j	B-	C+	C+
Not since Armando Muniz have we seen a fighter with such a disproportionately large head as Montiel's						
11/4/05	Allan Green KO 1 Jaidon Codrington	Showtime	sm	C+	A-	B-
What, the police don't have stun guns in Oklahoma?						
11/4/05	Sechew Powell W 10 Archak Ter-Meliksetian	Showtime	jm	C+	A	C+
Powell will never do anything exciting in the ring, but he's a good, solid boxer; this was … nice						
11/5/05	Rafael Marquez Silence Mabuza	Showtime	b	A	B+	B
Whether the cut was from a butt or a punch, this was just starting to get good; Mabuza's no joke						
11/5/05	Jeff Lacy KO 2 Scott Pemberton	Showtime	sm	A	D+	C
Isn't it fun when an overmatched guy gets so freaked out his body forgets how to fight? That's what happened here						
11/11/05	Juan Lazcano KO 9 Courtney Burton	Telefutura	jw	B+	C+	C+
It's time for someone close to Burton to suggest a career change						

Category Explanation: "Significance"—The importance of the bout to the division and the fighters' futures; "Matchup"—The quality of the fighters and the prefight determination of how their styles will mesh; "Result"—How the bout turned out, from the viewer's perspective.

(RING championship fights in **bold** type)

Division key: h—heavyweight; c—cruiserweight; lh—light heavyweight; sm—super middleweight; m—middleweight; jm—junior middleweight; w—welterweight; jw—junior welterweight; l—lightweight; jl—junior lightweight; f—featherweight; jf—junior featherweight; b—bantamweight; jb—junior bantamweight; fl—flyweight; jfl—junior flyweight; s—strawweight

Network key: PPV—Pay-Per-View; Show—Showtime; FOXSN—Fox Sports Net; Uni—Univision; Telef—Telefutura; Telem—Telemundo; HBO L—HBO Latino

A Fight For Freedom

In what was billed as the "First Ever World Boxing Championship Held In A Prison," Nanako Kukuchi of Japan used a relentless body attack to wear down Thailand's Nongmai Sor Siriporn and capture the vacant WBC women's strawweight title via seventh-round TKO on November 7.

Prison officials in Pathumthani, a suburb of Bangkok, had promised to release Sor Siriporn immediately if victorious, rewarding the first-time offender for her hard work and good behavior. The 26-year-old Sor Siriporn is serving a six-year sentence for selling methamphetamine, and a win would have erased the remaining 14 months she has left to serve. Kikuchi was focused on winning the title and seemingly completely oblivious of Sor Siriporn's quest for freedom.

The fight was broadcast on Thai television and garnered worldwide attention. Foreign media from the U.S., Italy, France, Germany, and Japan traveled to the Land of Smiles not only to watch the championship battle behind prison walls, but to also see whether or not the Thai would win her freedom in this most unorthodox manner.

Sor Siriporn fought aggressively, but was repeatedly turned back by the stronger, faster, and more experienced Kikuchi. In the seventh round, Kikuchi unloaded a barrage of punches, driving the Thai backward and pinning her against the ropes. With Sor Siriporn overwhelmed, defenseless, and totally spent, referee Bruce McTavish stopped the one-sided drubbing just 50 seconds into the round and ended Sor Siriporn's hope for an early release.

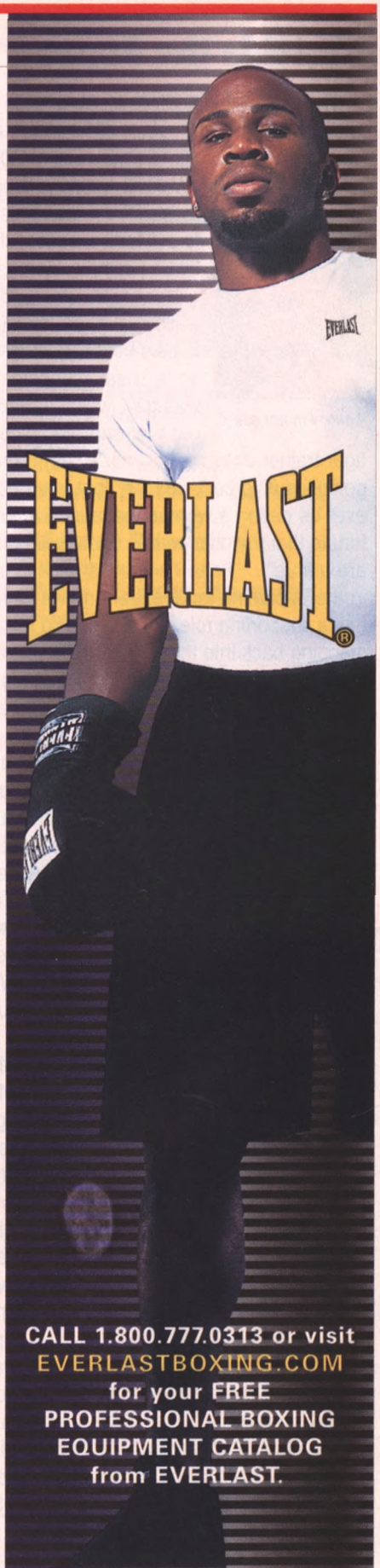
The WBC was roundly criticized for sanctioning the bout and for the inexplicable manner in which Sor Siriporn managed to obtain a number-three ranking and title shot with no verifiable professional fights. The WBC countered by declaring Sor Siriporn's actual record to be 8-0.

After the fight, Sor Siriporn set the record straight, "I didn't expect to win the fight, but I gave my all and did the best I could. After all, this was only my first professional fight."

—Scott Mallon

PHOTO BY PORNCHAI KITTIWONGSAKUL/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Sor Siriprom (right) takes a left from Kikuchi



Outside the Ropes

The International Olympic Committee rejected the International Amateur Boxing Association's proposal to add women's boxing to the program for the 2008 Olympic games in Beijing, China. "We will keep working to gain Olympic inclusion for women's boxing and hope to put forth a successful proposal for the 2012 Olympic Games in London," said **Julie Goldsticker** of USA Boxing ... Meanwhile, **Laila Ali**, the world's most famous female boxer, has set the record straight, so to speak, concerning reports that she was gay, which surfaced when word got out that she was divorcing former manager-trainer **Johnny McClain**. "Yes, I am in the process of getting a divorce," said Ali, "but I am not dating, nor will I ever be dating a woman, because I am not gay. It is unfortunate that my divorce has started rumors in the media that are untrue" ... **Felix Trinidad** is back in the ring as an actor in the upcoming independent movie *Santito*. Trinidad, who has a supporting role in the film, said it was " a little strange" stepping back into the ring for the first time since his loss to Winky Wright in May 2005 and subsequent retirement. *Santito* is due in theaters in Puerto Rico in early-2006 ... WBA heavyweight titleholder **John Ruiz** has filed a $10-million lawsuit against **James Toney**, alleging that Toney's use of steroids prior to their April 30, 2005, bout has caused Ruiz to "incur significant financial damage and damage to his reputation as a result." Ruiz' suit contends, "Toney's energy, aggression, and strength levels were unusually high in comparison to his physical condition." Toney was originally awarded a 12-round decision and the WBA belt, but the result was changed to a no-contest and the title returned to Ruiz when Toney's post-fight drug test revealed Nandrolone in his system... **Jay Larkin**, who headed Showtime's boxing department for nearly two decades, was fired in November. Apparently, Larkin was the victim of corporate downsizing that occurred when Viacom, Showtime's parent company, split into two entities. "Jay was a tremendous asset to the organization for a long time and we're going to miss him and his contribution, but life goes on," said **Ken Hershman**, a Showtime senior vice president and the general manager of sports and event programming ... Former lightweight champion **Ken Buchanan**, 60, was hospitalized in November after falling at his home and injuring his ankle ... Former IBF junior bantamweight titleholder **Ellyas Pical**, 48, was sentenced to seven months in jail for selling illegal drugs at a disco in Jakarta, Indonesia, where he worked as a security officer ... According to reports published in *The Pensacola Journal*, former WBA featherweight titleholder **Derrick "Smoke" Gainer** was arrested for refusing to pay a $4 parking fee. Gainer posted $500 bond and was released ... Former junior welterweight prospect **Freddie Cadena**, 29, was arrested and charged with murdering popular nightclub DJ **Rafael "Ralphi" Falcon** in Paterson, New Jersey. According to reports in the *Herald News*, Cadena and Falcon got into a scuffle, possibly over a woman, at the Rio Grande nightclub in October. After exchanging words, the two went outside, where Cadena allegedly punched Falcon, who fell to the ground. Falcon was taken to St. Joseph's Regional Medical Center, where he lapsed into a coma and died nine days after the incident. Cadena was 15-0 (10) when he was TKO'd by **Jesse Feliciano** on April 4, 2002, in a bout in which he also suffered a career-ending head injury. This is not the first time Cadena has been in trouble. He was convicted of aggravated assault with a weapon in 1996 and convicted of simple assault in 2002. Cadena had been released from jail, where he served a 179-day sentence for domestic violence, four weeks prior to the altercation with Falcon ... Former light heavyweight contender **Lottie Mwale**, 53, died in his native Zambia on October 18. He had suffered from Parkinson's for many years prior to his death. Mwale turned pro in 1977 and compiled a 44-9 (34) record before retiring in 2002. He held the British Commonwealth, African, and Zambian light heavyweight titles, but failed in his only shot at a major title, getting knocked out by WBC 175-pound titleholder **Matthew Saad Muhammad** in November 1980 ... Boxing promoter **Don Georgino**, 60, died in November in Las Vegas. Georgino promoted several fights for featherweight champ **Salvador Sanchez** during the early-1980s, including Sanchez' title bouts with **Danny "Little Red" Lopez** ... Former boxing commissioner and referee **Bobby Watson**, 83, died at his home in Redford, Michigan, in late-October. Among the more famous bouts Watson refereed was **Kirkland Laing**'s upset decision over **Roberto Duran** in Detroit in 1982 ... Former South African national welterweight and middleweight champion **George Angelo**, 80, died in Randburg. In the biggest fight of his career, Angelo lost a 15-round decision to former middleweight champion **Randy Turpin** in 1952 in London, England. Angelo, 36-6 (4), retired immediately afterward due to a detached retina.

Laila: I'm not gay

Cadena: Charged with murder

Quotable

"I'm ready to die. I'm not saying I want to, but if I do die in the ring, then God has marked it down as my fate. If I had a choice I'd take the ring, because I wouldn't want to die under a truck. Dying in the ring would at least mean something."

—Wayne McCullough, explaining why he's ready to continue fighting, even though many think he should retire.

"Hamed believes that Hatton has shown what is possible. Actually, he has shown what Hamed threw away."

—Nick Pitt, writing in ***The Sunday Times*** *about Naseem Hamed saying he was inspired to make a comeback by Ricky Hatton's success.*

Ratings Analysis

For Period Ended November 16, 2005

Heavyweights: There is a major change atop the division, as Vitali Klitschko announced his retirement on November 9, leaving the world heavyweight championship vacant. There was also a change at the bottom of the division, with David Tua re-entering the rankings at 10, replacing Jameel McCline, who drops out after losing a unanimous 10-round decision to journeyman Zuri Lawrence.

Cruiserweights: No changes, though a significant move could be ahead when world champion Jean-Marc Mormeck faces sixth-ranked O'Neil Bell in early-January.

Light Heavyweights: Eric Harding enters at 10, replacing Montell Griffin. Harding joins the rankings based on impressive victories over David Telesco and Daniel Judah, while Griffin exits after losing two of his last three fights.

Super Middleweights: No changes, but there will be a dramatic shakeup in the division and the crowning of the first RING super middleweight champion when Jeff Lacy, who is rated third, takes on number-one contender Joe Calzaghe in either early-February or early-March.

Middleweights: No changes. There could, however, be a new champion by the next issue, since this issue went to press two weeks before the Jermain Taylor-Bernard Hopkins middleweight world championship rematch.

Junior Middleweights: No changes.

Welterweights: No changes.

Junior Welterweights: No changes.

Lightweights: No changes.

Junior Lightweights: No changes, but top-rated Marco Antonio Barrera is scheduled to challenge IBF lightweight titleholder Jesus Chavez on March 25 in a bout that could alter the landscape of two divisions.

Featherweights: No changes.

Junior Featherweights: Steve Molitor debuts at 10, replacing Nedal Hussein, who endured a lopsided loss to number-five ranked featherweight Scott Harrison. There will be a major shift next issue as number-one contender Oscar Larios meets third-rated Isreal Vazquez for the 122-pound RING world championship on the Taylor-Hopkins undercard.

Bantamweights: Jhonny Gonzalez (ninth last issue) and Ratanachai Vorapin (fourth last issue) switch places, based on Gonzalez' seventh-round stoppage of Vorapin.

Flyweights: No changes.

Junior Flyweights: No changes.

Strawweights: No changes.

Pound-For-Pound: No changes.

The RING
"THE BIBLE OF BOXING"

Pound-For-Pound

1. **Floyd Mayweather**
   Junior Welterweight
2. **Winky Wright**
   Junior Middleweight
3. **Marco Antonio Barrera**
   Junior Lightweight
4. **Manny Pacquiao**
   Junior Lightweight
5. **Juan Manuel Marquez**
   Featherweight
6. **Erik Morales**
   Junior Lightweight
7. **Ricky Hatton**
   Junior Welterweight
8. **Jose Luis Castillo**
   Junior Welterweight
9. **Jermain Taylor**
   Middleweight
10. **Bernard Hopkins**
    Middleweight

For weekly updated Ring ratings, go to
TheRing-online.com

The Ring Ratings

For Period Ended November 16, 2005

PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN FISCHER/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

Zsolt Erdei remained second at light heavyweight with a 12th-round kayo of Sahnoune

How Our Ratings Are Compiled

Fighters recognized as champions by THE RING are rated at the top of their division, with the top 10 contenders listed below.

Championship vacancies can be filled by winning a box-off between THE RING'S number-one and number-two contenders, or, in certain instances, a box-off between our number-one and number-three contenders.

The only three occasions when a fighter will lose his championship status are when he retires, moves to another weight division, or is defeated in a championship bout.

Ratings By The Editors

Heavyweights

Weight Unlimited

Champ: Vacant

1. **CHRIS BYRD** Flint, MI 39-2-1 (20)
2. **JOHN RUIZ** Methuen, MA 41-5-1 (28)
3. **HASIM RAHMAN** Baltimore, MD 41-5-1 (33)
4. **JAMES TONEY** Ann Arbor, MI 69-4-2 (43)
5. **LAMON BREWSTER** Los Angeles, CA 33-2 (29)
6. **MONTE BARRETT** Queens, NY 31-4 (17)
7. **CALVIN BROCK** Charlotte, NC 26-0 (21)
8. **WLADIMIR KLITSCHKO** Ukraine 45-3 (40)
9. **SAMUEL PETER** Las Vegas, NV 24-1 (21)
10. **DAVID TUA** New Zealand 44-3-1 (38)

Jr. Middleweights

Weight Limit: 154 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **ROMAN KARMAZIN** Russia 34-1-1 (21)
2. **KASSIM OUMA** W. Palm Beach, FL 22-2-1 (14)
3. **DANIEL SANTOS** Puerto Rico 29-2-1 (20)
4. **FERNANDO VARGAS** Oxnard, CA 26-2 (22)
5. **IKE QUARTEY** Ghana 36-2-1 (30)
6. **VERNO PHILLIPS** Aurora, CO 38-10-1 (20)
7. **JAVIER CASTILLEJO** Spain 59-6 (39)
8. **RODNEY JONES** Lafayette, LA 36-3-1 (22)
9. **ALEJANDRO GARCIA** Mexico 25-1 (24)
10. **SERGIO MARTINEZ** Argentina 34-1-1 (16)

Featherweights

Weight Limit: 126 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **JUAN MANUEL MARQUEZ** Mexico 44-2-1 (33)
2. **INJIN CHI** South Korea 30-2-1 (18)
3. **HUMBERTO SOTO** Mexico 38-5-2 (22)
4. **ROCKY JUAREZ** Houston, TX 23-1 (16)
5. **SCOTT HARRISON** Scotland 25-2-2 (14)
6. **VICTOR POLO** Colombia 36-5-3 (26)
7. **CHRIS JOHN** Indonesia 36-0-1 (20)
8. **JOAN GUZMAN** Dominican Republic 24-0 (17)
9. **SPEND ABAZI** Denmark 32-1 (10)
10. **HIROYUKI ENOKI** Japan 23-0-1 (17)

Jr. Featherweights

Weight Limit: 122 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **OSCAR LARIOS** Mexico 56-3-1 (36)
2. **MAHYAR MONSHIPOUR** France 28-2-2 (19)
3. **ISRAEL VAZQUEZ** Mexico 38-3 (28)
4. **CELESTINO CABALLERO** Panama 23-2 (16)
5. **POONSAWAT KRATINGAENGYM** Thailand 23-0 (15)
6. **RICARDO CORDOBA** Panama 26-1 (18)
7. **YODDAMRONG SITHYODTHONG** Thailand 43-2-1 (18)
8. **SERGIO MANUEL MEDINA** Argentina 23-0 (14)
9. **GABULA VABAZA** South Africa 22-0-1 (5)
10. **STEVE MOLITOR** Canada 22-0 (8)

Bantamweights

Weight Limit: 118 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **RAFAEL MARQUEZ** Mexico 35-3 (31)
2. **HOZUMI HASEGAWA** Japan 19-2 (6)
3. **VEERAPOL SAHAPROM** Thailand 50-2-2 (35)
4. **JHONNY GONZALEZ** Mexico 31-4 (27)
5. **SILENCE MABUZA** South Africa 18-1 (15)
6. **GENARO GARCIA** Mexico 34-4 (20)
7. **CRUZ CARVAJAL** Mexico 25-13-1 (21)
8. **RICARDO VARGAS** Mexico 39-11-3 (13)
9. **RATANACHAI VORAPIN** Thailand 65-9 (42)
10. **WLADIMIR SIDORENKO** Ukraine 17-0 (6)

Cruiserweights
Weight Limit: 200 pounds

Champ: JEAN-MARC MORMECK
France 31-2 (21)

1. **GUILLERMO JONES**
Panama 33-3-2 (26)
2. **STEVE CUNNINGHAM**
Philadelphia, PA 18-0 (9)
3. **JOHNNY NELSON**
England 44-12-2 (29)
4. **CARL THOMPSON**
England 33-6 (25)
5. **WAYNE BRAITHWAITE**
Guyana 21-2 (17)
6. **O'NEIL BELL**
Atlanta, GA 25-1-1 (23)
7. **DALE BROWN**
Canada 34-4-1 (22)
8. **PIETRO AURINO**
Italy 34-2 (16)
9. **ALEXANDER GUROV**
Ukrain 38-4-1 (33)
10. **KRZYSZTOF WLODARCZYK**
Poland 33-1 (26)

Light Heavyweights
Weight Limit: 175 pounds

Champ: ANTONIO TARVER
Orlando, FL 24-3 (18)

1. **GLEN JOHNSON**
Miami, FL 43-10-2 (29)
2. **ZSOLT ERDEI**
Hungary 23-0 (14)
3. **ROY JONES**
Pensacola, FL 49-4 (38)
4. **CLINTON WOODS**
England 38-3-1 (23)
5. **FABRICE TIOZZO**
France 47-2 (31)
6. **TOMASZ ADAMEK**
Poland 30-0 (21)
7. **JULIO GONZALEZ**
Huntington Beach, CA 38-3 (23)
8. **PAUL BRIGGS**
Australia 24-2 (18)
9. **HUGO GARAY**
Argentina 25-2 (13)
10. **ERIC HARDING**
West Hartford, CT 23-3-1 (7)

Super Middleweights
Weight Limit: 168 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **JOE CALZAGHE**
Wales 40-0 (31)
2. **MIKKEL KESSLER**
Denmark 36-0 (27)
3. **JEFF LACY**
St. Petersburg, FL 21-0 (17)
4. **MARKUS BEYER**
Germany 33-2 (12)
5. **ANTHONY MUNDINE**
Australia 24-3 (19)
6. **DANNY GREEN**
Australia 20-2 (19)
7. **MANNY SIACA**
Puerto Rico 20-5 (18)
8. **OTIS GRANT**
Canada 38-2-1 (17)
9. **ROBIN REID**
England 38-5-1 (27)
10. **LIBRADO ANDRADE**
Mexico 22-0 (16)

Middleweights
Weight Limit: 160 pounds

Champ: JERMAIN TAYLOR
Little Rock, AR 24-0 (17)

1. **BERNARD HOPKINS**
Philadelphia, PA 46-3-1 (32)
2. **WINKY WRIGHT**
St. Petersburg, FL 49-3 (25)
3. **FELIX STURM**
Germany 24-1 (11)
4. **ARTHUR ABRAHAM**
Germany 17-0 (15)
5. **HOWARD EASTMAN**
England 40-3 (35)
6. **KINGSLEY IKEKE**
Canada 23-1 (13)
7. **SAM SOLIMAN**
Australia 31-7 (12)
8. **CHAD DAWSON**
New Haven, CT 19-0 (13)
9. **SEBASTIAN SYLVESTER**
Germany 20-1 (8)
10. **SCOTT DANN**
England 23-2 (16)

Welterweights
Weight Limit: 147 pounds

Champ: ZAB JUDAH
Brooklyn, NY 34-2 (25)

1. **ANTONIO MARGARITO**
Mexico 32-4 (23)
2. **CORY SPINKS**
St. Louis, MO 34-3 (11)
3. **SHANE MOSLEY**
Pomona, CA 41-4 (35)
4. **LUIS COLLAZO**
Queens, NY 26-1 (12)
5. **THOMAS DAMGAARD**
Denmark 37-0 (27)
6. **KERMIT CINTRON**
Reading, PA 25-1 (23)
7. **JOSE ANTONIO RIVERA**
Worcester, MA 37-4-1 (24)
8. **OKTAY URKAL**
Germany 36-3 (11)
9. **DAVID ESTRADA**
Chicago, IL 18-2 (9)
10. **SEBASTIAN LUJAN**
Argentina 24-2-2 (16)

Jr. Welterweights
Weight Limit: 140 pounds

Champ: RICKY HATTON
England 39-0 (29)

1. **FLOYD MAYWEATHER**
Grand Rapids, MI 34-0 (23)
2. **MIGUEL COTTO**
Puerto Rico 25-0 (21)
3. **CARLOS MAUSSA**
Colombia 19-2 (16)
4. **KOSTYA TSZYU**
Australia 31-2 (25)
5. **JOSE LUIS CASTILLO**
Mexico 53-7-1 (47)
6. **JUNIOR WITTER**
England 33-1-2 (19)
7. **ARTURO GATTI**
Jersey City, NJ 39-7 (30)
8. **VIVIAN HARRIS**
Brooklyn, NY 25-2-1 (17)
9. **DeMARCUS CORLEY**
Washington, D.C. 31-4-1 (17)
10. **LOVEMORE NDOU**
Australia 40-8-1 (26)

Lightweights
Weight Limit: 135 pounds

Champ: DIEGO CORRALES
Las Vegas, NV 40-3 (33)

1. **JOEL CASAMAYOR**
Miami, FL 31-3-1 (19)
2. **JUAN LAZCANO**
El Paso, TX 35-3-1 (27)
3. **JUAN DIAZ**
Houston, TX 28-0 (14)
4. **JULIO DIAZ**
Coachella, CA 32-3 (24)
5. **ACELINO FREITAS**
Brazil 37-1 (32)
6. **ZAHIR RAHEEM**
Las Vegas, NV 27-1 (16)
7. **JESUS CHAVEZ**
Mexico 42-3 (29)
8. **ISAAC HLATSHWAYO**
South Africa 22-0 (9)
9. **LAVKA SIM**
Mongolia 21-4-1 (18)
10. **RICKY QUILES**
Puerto Rico 38-6-3 (8)

Jr. Lightweights
Weight Limit: 130 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **MARCO ANTONIO BARRERA**
Mexico 61-4 (42)
2. **ERIK MORALES**
Mexico 48-3 (34)
3. **MANNY PACQUIAO**
Philippines 40-3-2 (31)
4. **VICENTE MOSQUERA**
Panama 21-1-1 (10)
5. **YODSANAN NANTHACHAI**
Thailand 44-3-1 (36)
6. **JORGE BARRIOS**
Argentina 44-2-1 (32)
7. **CARLOS HERNANDEZ**
Bellflower, CA 41-6-1 (24)
8. **ALEX ARTHUR**
Scotland 21-1 (17)
9. **ROBBIE PEDEN**
Australia 25-3 (14)
10. **JANOS NAGY**
Hungary 23-0 (14)

Jr. Bantamweights
Weight Limit: 115 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **MARTIN CASTILLO**
Mexico 29-1 (16)
2. **MASAMORI TOKUYAMA**
North Korea 31-3-1 (8)
3. **LUIS PEREZ**
Nicaragua 23-1 (15)
4. **FERNANDO MONTIEL**
Mexico 32-1-1 (24)
5. **ALEXANDER MUNOZ**
Venezuela 28-1 (26)
6. **KATSUSHIGE KAWASHIMA**
Japan 28-4 (18)
7. **JOSE NAVARRO**
Los Angeles, CA 23-1 (10)
8. **HAWK MAKEPULA**
South Africa 26-3 (17)
9. **GERRY PENALOSA**
Philippines 48-5-2 (33)
10. **MBWANA MATUMLA**
Tanzania 15-1 (9)

Flyweights
Weight Limit: 112 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **PONGSAKLEK WONJONGKAM**
Thailand 58-2 (31)
2. **LORENZO PARRA**
Venezuela 26-0 (17)
3. **VIC DARCHINYAN**
Australia 24-0 (19)
4. **JORGE ARCE**
Mexico 41-3-1 (31)
5. **IRENE PACHECO**
Colombia 30-1 (23)
6. **OMAR NARVAEZ**
Argentina 19-0-2 (13)
7. **ROSENDO ALVAREZ**
Nicaragua 35-2-2 (22)
8. **BRAHIM ASLOUM**
France 19-0 (7)
9. **TAKEFUMI SAKATA**
Japan 24-3-1 (10)
10. **VICTOR BURGOS**
Mexico 38-14-3 (22)

Jr. Flyweights
Weight Limit: 108 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **ROBERTO VASQUEZ**
Panama 20-1 (17)
2. **WILL GRIGSBY**
St. Paul, MN 18-2-1 (11)
3. **HUGO CAZARES**
Mexico 22-3-1 (16)
4. **NELSON DIEPPA**
Puerto Rico 22-2-2 (13)
5. **BRIAN VILORIA**
Waipahu, HI 18-0 (12)
6. **ULISES SOLIS**
Mexico 19-1 (15)
7. **JOSE AGUIRRE**
Mexico 33-4-1 (20)
8. **KERMIN GUARDIA**
Colombia 35-4 (21)
9. **JUNICHIRO KANEDA**
Japan 12-2 (8)
10. **NABUAKI MASUDA**
Japan 21-3 (3)

Strawweights
Weight Limit: 105 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **YUTAKA NIIDA**
Japan 19-1-3 (8)
2. **MUHAMMAD RACHMAN**
Indonesia 50-7-4 (22)
3. **IVAN CALDERON**
Puerto Rico 23-0 (5)
4. **EAGLE KYOWA**
Japan 14-1 (5)
5. **KATSUNARI TAKAYAMA**
Japan 15-2 (7)
6. **ISAAC BUSTOS**
Mexico 24-7-3 (13)
7. **JUAN LANDAETA**
Venezuela 19-3-1 (16)
8. **OMAR SOTO**
Mexico 14-2-1 (10)
9. **DANIEL REYES**
Colombia 35-3-1 (30)
10. **RODEL MAYOL**
Philippines 21-0 (16)

By Jeff Ryan

Stage Whispers

It's high time that we killed all of those acting analogies we writers are so fond of using while discussing fighters and their profession. From now on, there will be no more references to boxers "taking the stage" or "being in the spotlight." No more talking about "opening on Broadway" or "starring on the 'Great White Way'" when a guy is fighting in New York. And let's resist the temptation to dub boxing "the theater of the absurd" or call Bernard Hopkins "the longest running show in the middleweight division."

PHOTO BY DUANE LONG

Gatti: One comeback too many

Too many fighters, you see, are taking this stuff literally. They apparently think they're walking, breathing, and feinting theater productions. How else to explain that some of them have been turning in the same performances, reciting the same lines, and revealing the same plot twists for what seems like forever. Geez, even *Cats* and *A Chorus Line* knew when the public finally had enough.

Kindly join me in booing off stage the following acts that have grown incredibly stale:

•Arturo Gatti on the comeback trail: "Thunder" has been one of the most entertaining and gutsy fighters your columnist has been lucky enough to cover in two decades on the boxing beat. His left hook is as pretty as his eyebrows are ugly, and his trilogy with Micky Ward is time capsule material. Nonetheless, Gatti has a big problem. One that will, in my estimation, forever keep him out of the International Boxing Hall of Fame.

His dilemma is that he has never been able to raise his game against elite competition. He beats the Wards and Tracy Pattersons, thrashes a Gabe Ruelas here and a Leonard Dorin there, but was licked more thoroughly than Jorge Arce's lollipop when he faced the two best opponents of his career: Oscar De La Hoya and Floyd Mayweather.

Gatti will be a very old 34 in April, he's coming off a loss to Mayweather in which he was completely outclassed, and he has taken a frightening amount of cranial punishment in a 15-year career. One can't say Thunder has nothing left to prove, because he does: He has to prove he can beat a great fighter. But he'll never be able to prove that, and the idea of him trading shots with *anyone* again seems nothing short of cruel.

•Vitali Klitschko on the mend: The heavyweight champion postponed his defense against Hasim Rahman four times. First came Klitschko's thigh injury, then the realization that the thigh hadn't healed, then back surgery, and now surgery to repair a torn anterior cruciate ligament and meniscus in the right knee. As the exasperated football team doctor played by

PHOTO BY TODD WARSHAW/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

Ryan predicts injury-prone Vitali will be back

James Woods in *Any Given Sunday* said when given a rundown of the players' many injuries, what's next? A stigmata?

"Lately, I have been spending more time with my injuries than with my opponents in the ring," said the man who last punched for pay in December '04. Klitschko retired in November after learning the extent of his knee damage, but within days was saying he'd return if he could lure Lennox Lewis out of retirement. Regardless of what Lewis does, Klitschko will be back in '06 to face *someone*, most likely whoever assumes the top spot.

And when Klitschko does return, there will be more people holding their breath during his training camp than you'll find in a Taco Bell men's room. We can envision it already: A strained wrist sustained while tying his shoe. A ruptured Achilles tendon suffered while climbing the ring steps for a sparring session. A stress fracture of the arm, the result of a mistimed high-five with his trainer. And, worst of all, an abdominal hernia caused by his ill-advised attempt to lift his own injury report off the table.

•Roy Jones in survival mode: It was infuriating enough when the safety-first Jones conned us out of our money, free time, and column inches while serving as king of the light heavyweights. What's worse is when Jones went into his rubber match against Antonio Tarver intent not on winning, but on merely surviving while doing just enough to make it appear that he was competing seriously.

And as if that's not bad enough, Jones follows his rip-off showing by talking about a fourth Tarver clash and suggesting that he be paid mega-millions for it. Millions? For what? More sleight-of-hand? Hey, Roy, listen to me. Even when you were good you weren't worth the money. What makes you think people want to pay to watch you now after three consecutive losses?

•Oscar De La Hoya on the shelf: The champion of four weight classes used to be considered a full-time fighter and part-time promoter. Today, the reverse is true. De La Hoya's Golden Boy Promotions seems to have more locations than Pizza Hut and the former Olympic gold medalist signs fighters about as frequently as he signs autographs.

He hasn't fought since Hopkins leveled him with a bodyshot in September '04, and though he says he wants to compete twice more before penning his retirement speech (Ricardo Mayorga has been mentioned as a possible opponent), De La Hoya doesn't even sound like a fighter anymore. One-punch knockout defeats, a burgeoning business, more money than one can spend in two lifetimes, and a year away from the smell of the battlefield sure can rob a guy of his passion. Sadly, though, it robbed us of what could have been a few more Golden matchups in 2005.

•John Ruiz, no matter what he does: Anything short of Ruiz retiring to open a shoe store is unacceptable to me at this point. Recently, "The Quiet Man" has been speaking softly but carrying a big subpoena. He's suing James Toney, who out-

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Jones took the money and ran, literally, in the third Tarver fight

Personal Perceptions:

The last word on everything from a guy who must be missing a few brain cells to some other Gray matter:

•Isn't this the same Artest who was *backpedaling* away from Wallace during their on-court altercation? If the Pacers' human pace car is ever pitted against a professional fighter, it would probably have to be in a steel cage. Either that, or the boxer better be prepared to chase Artest into the cheap seats.

•How convenient that the Jeff Lacy-Joe Calzaghe shootout finally came together a few weeks before Thanksgiving. You'd be hard-pressed to find any fight lover who isn't giving thanks for that one.

•My educated guess on a Klitschko return date? Saturday, June 10, 2006. Let's bet a bottle of Ukrainian vodka on it.

•A bout like Chris Byrd-DaVarryl Williamson is a far greater argument for the abolition of boxing than any brutal bloodbath ever could be.

•This just in: Ruiz watched a tape of his career highlights and is now suing himself.

•Reading about junior middleweight Roman Karmazin's unsanctioned basement brawls made me think that his life story would make for a good movie. Heck, it would have to be better than that idiotic paean to haymaker-hurling cellar-dwellers, *Fight Club*.

•Oh, so *Good Night, And Good Luck*, the critically acclaimed flick directed by George Clooney is about Edward R. Murrow? Thanks for clearing that up. Upon hearing that the film's main character was an unsmiling, posturing, tough-guy reporter, many of us just assumed it was the Jim Gray story.

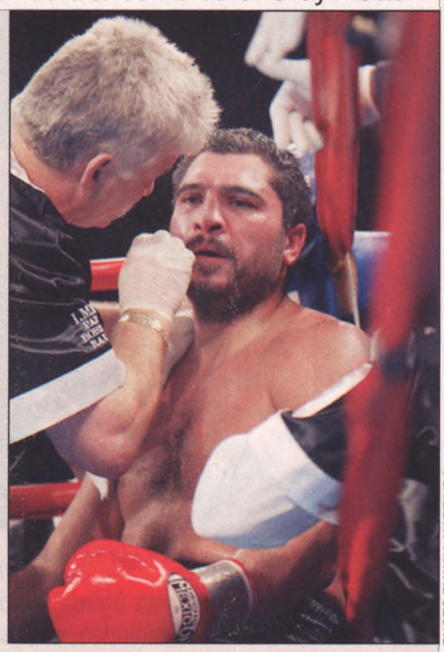


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Guess who Ruiz is suing next

pointed him for the WBA heavyweight title in April, subsequently tested positive for steroids, was stripped of the belt, and watched it be returned to Ruiz. Despite having the alphabet crown in his possession again, and the chance to land at least one more lucrative match against a guy craving his meaningless alphabet hardware, Ruiz claims in his lawsuit that he was damaged financially by that defeat to Toney.

Here's a new flash for the, *ahem,* pride of Methuen, Massachusetts: Nothing has damaged Ruiz' bank account, image, and place in history more than his own knack for underachieving. People like their heavyweight kings—even the paper ones—to fight with passion, score knockouts, and not be beaten so easily by little guys like Jones and Toney, fighters who began their careers as *middleweights.*

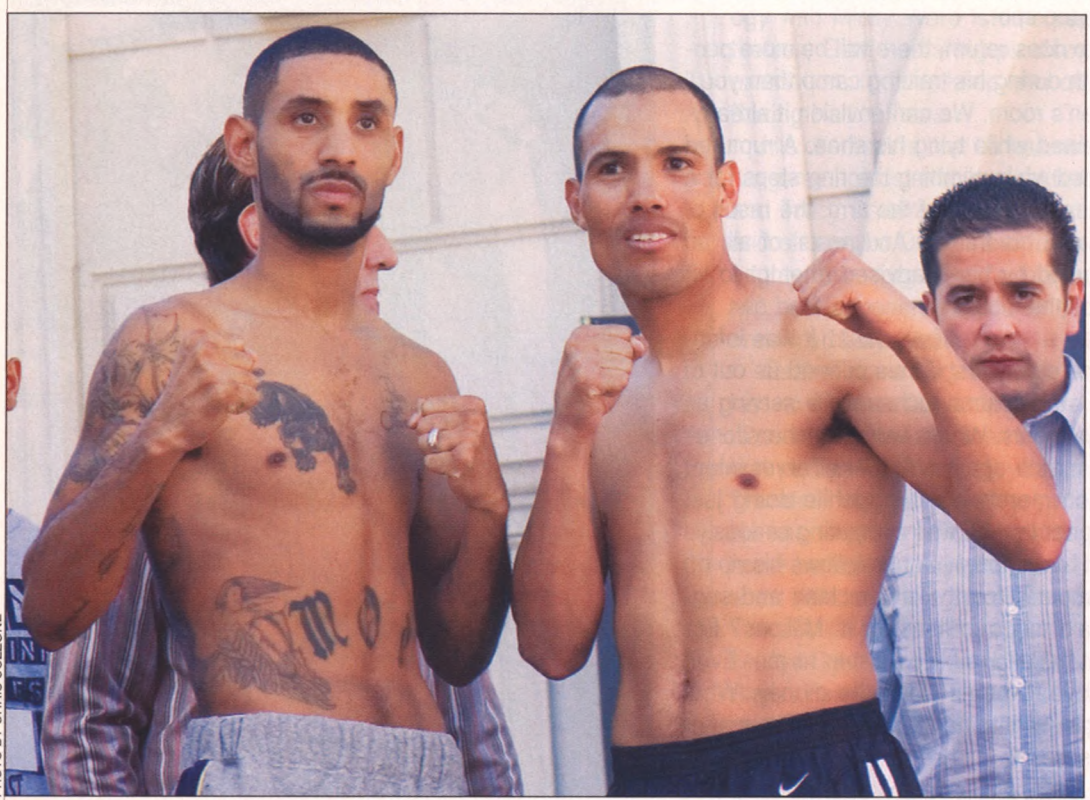


PHOTO BY CHRIS COZZONE

Corrales-Castillo series has been tainted

•Fighters who can't make weight: Correct me if anything is wrong here, but didn't Jose Luis Castillo know for

months that he'd be fighting a rematch of his hellacious war with Diego Corrales? Or did someone approach Castillo a couple of days before the bout, spring the assignment on him, and tell him to abruptly cancel his plans for dinner at an all-you-can-eat buffet? That Castillo weighed in at 3½ pounds over the lightweight limit (not to mention that his doctor tried to manipulate the scale) was disgraceful. So is any fighter failing to make weight after having weeks or months to get in condition.

PHOTO BY PAUL MORSE/THE WHITE HOUSE

Ali is honored by President Bush at the White House

Fighters are professional athletes and grown adults who should be able to control their bodies. (Hell, even high school wrestlers can do it.) Spare me the cliches and excuses about growing out of a weight class, maturing physically, etc. If a boxer knows he can no longer make a certain weight, then *he shouldn't sign to fight at it.* Castillo-Corrales had the makings of a legendary rivalry. But following Castillo's rematch kayo victory, a win that means little in light of his weight advantage, what was expected to be a trilogy for the ages is now tainted.

This & That: *A few bite-size morsels of gossip, news, and rumor. In the future, they'll be accompanied by a selection of four dipping sauces:* Muhammad Ali received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor, during a White House ceremony in November. Said President Bush, "When you say, 'the greatest of all-time' is in the room, everyone knows who you mean. It's quite a claim to make, but Muhammad Ali once said, 'It's not bragging if you can back it up.'" Ali's appearance in Washington quelled rumors that his health had been rapidly declining and that he might be near death. Speaking of "The Greatest," after three years of construction at a cost of $75-million, The Muhammad Ali Center opened in the ex-champ's hometown of Louisville, Kentucky. The museum features everything from exhibits on Ali's childhood to a replica of his Deer Lake, Pennsylvania, gym ... Look for Rahman's first defense of his newly awarded WBC belt to come against Toney ... Former IBF featherweight titlist Prince Naseem Hamed, who hasn't fought since decisioning Manuel Calvo in May '02, is promising a comeback in '06 ... T.J. Day, a Reno developer, has replaced Dr. Flip Homansky on the five-person Nevada Athletic Commission ... A recent installment of the ESPN Classic show, *Who's # 1?,* ranked the 20 most overrated people, places, and things in sports. De La Hoya placed 17th, joining an illustrious lineup that included Joe Namath, Notre Dame football, the Atlanta Braves, the NBA Draft Lottery, the Indy 500, the Heisman Trophy, golfer Greg Norman, and others ... Get this: Indiana Pacers forward Ron Artest not only says he envisions a future as a heavyweight fighter, but is proposing a pay-per-view bout (with a $10-million purse for him) in the interim against Detroit Pistons enforcer Ben Wallace. As everyone no doubt remembers, it was an altercation between Artest and Wallace in a game last season that sparked a beer-tossing, players-in-the stands riot ... Don King had the honor (?) of being roasted by The Friars Club in October ... Sorry, boxing historians, but New York City's Landmarks Preservation Commission and New York State's Historic Preservation Office both say they won't grant landmark status to Yankee Stadium, which played host to Joe Louis, Rocky Marciano, Sugar Ray Robinson, Archie Moore, Ali, and other ring greats. So the ballpark will be torn down when a new home for the Yankees opens in 2009. ■

By Ivan Goldman

More Magoos Than Sensitive Souls Can Handle

One of these days I'll write an entire column about nice people doing nice things. But this month I'm duty-bound to address a festering backlog of Magoos and other unpleasantness left over from 2005. So if you want to read positive items, skip down to the last three or four. If you feel up to dealing with harsher truths, read on.

Death and Decency: Word came out from the *L.A. Times*' Steve Springer that after Levander Johnson lost his lightweight title to Jesus Chavez and collapsed outside his Las Vegas dressing room, HBO proceeded with a postfight pool-side party at the MGM Grand. Yes, even as doctors performed the emergency brain surgery that ultimately failed, the network partied on.

If the HBO honchos felt no sorrow, they might at least have had the decency to pretend they did. No circus would hold a party immediately after a trapeze artist took a fall and sank into a coma. But a circus is a close community, and in the boxing world, spoiled network execs are as far removed from the sorrows of non-celebrity fighters as Marie Antoinette was from the agony of the peasants. *Jeez, will you look at that? I ran over some wretch while I was on my cell phone. Drag the body off the road. I'm overdue at the palace.*

Not OK in Oklahoma: Whatever native-Amer-

PHOTO BY JED JACOBSOHN/GETTY IMAGES

The tragic Chavez-Johnson bout didn't stop HBO's pool-side party

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

It's time to stop babying Chavez Jr.

ican "commission" presides over boxing in Miami, Oklahoma, it should slap six-month suspensions on the cornermen of Jaidon Codrington and anyone else tussling with security people and interfering with the physician trying to examine the unconscious Codrington. Arresting them and throwing them in the clink would not be excessive. But don't hold your breath.

Referee Gerald Ritter was only one or two seconds slow, but when super middle Allan Green was raining hell on Codrington's skull, that was an eternity. This game is not for the hesitant. In fact, this game, as Green made clear with his fists, is not a game.

like watching somebody stick up an orphanage. Manny Pacquiao's brother won that fight like Houston won the World Series. Sitting ringside, I gave him two rounds, and that was generous. To his credit, Bobby Pacquiao's chief second, Freddie Roach, called Hernandez the winner. The contest was so one-sided you could have made a case for stopping it. I'm sick of the Nevada commission bragging about its safety standards. What about its fairness standards? Officials there worry about fighters' health for the same reason shepherds watch over their sheep. Duane Ford, who scored it 95-93 for Pacquiao, is the same wizard who gave round 12 to exhausted, running-for-his-life Jermain Taylor in his first go-around against Bernard Hopkins. Don't expect negative consequences for Ford or Chuck Giampa, his partner in Hernandez-Pacquiao ineptitude.

On the same card, Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. beat up another defenseless gringo off the midwestern circuit. How many times must Mexico avenge the Alamo? Apologists say Junior, 19, fights tomato cans because he took a pro express train past the usual amateur career. But when fighters like Oscar De La Hoya, Shane Mosley, Vernon Forrest, and Antonio Tarver were Chavez' age, they fought grown-ups from Cuba, Germany, and the splintered Soviet Union. Their opponents were professionals in the guise of amateurs. Chavez Junior fights amateurs in the guise of professionals, all of it sanctioned by compliant commissions. I have nothing against Junior personally, but if one of these no-hopers caught him with a lucky punch, it wouldn't break my heart.

Trouble in Nevada: The disappointing Diego-Corrales-Jose Luis Castillo rematch capped what turned out to be an unusually rotten night for boxing. In the main event, Team Castillo diabolically decided to hell with making weight, correctly predicting the weakened, lion-hearted "Chico" would climb in the ring with him anyway. My Showtime friend Steve Farhood, who interviewed Castillo twice during the preceding 48 hours, saw no evidence he was skipping meals or liquids, while Corrales, he said, was clearly tortured with thirst.

Before the main-event debacle, Las Vegas judges robbed Carlos "Famoso" Hernandez so heartlessly and unambiguously it was

PHOTO BY DOUG BENC/GETTY IMAGES

Why was Raiymkulov allowed to take such a prolonged beating?

Trouble in New Jersey: Magoos to the next big thing Sam Peter, who knocked down Wladimir Klitschko twice with rabbit punches in the fifth round, and to referee Randy Neumann, who ruled them legitimate knockdowns. The Nigerian cheater throws repeated shots to the back of the head in every fight, and I've never seen him penalized. This guy needs warnings, point deductions, disqualifications, fines, whatever it takes. Punches to the brain stem, which can cause a disabling or even fatal injury, should be treated at least as seriously as hitting low, which is a foul whether intentional or not.

Florida Mismatch: The measured beating administered to Almazbek "Kid Diamond" Raiymkulov by Nate Campbell was like watching someone drowning a puppy and letting him up for air every three minutes. When you've got yourself a total mismatch, stop it. Magoos to everybody, particularly the frozen Florida commission.

Trouble with Byrd: I'm still amazed by that Chris Byrd-DaVarryl-Williamson 12-round waltz on Showtime. Can you believe world alphabet titles have become so debased that fighters competing for one must be warned by the presiding commission to pick up the pace? What a snorer. I'd rather pick up decorating tips on *Queer Eye For The Straight Guy*. Byrd said he had to be cautious because his opponent packed a big punch. Someone needs to inform him that when you're a fighter, from time to time people will try to punch you. That's why they issue you boxing gloves. So you can punch back.

PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES

Hey, Mike, is that water or vodka in your glass?

Be Like Mike?: Mike Tyson arrested in Brazil for throwing around some camera guys? Nothing new there. More interesting was a trip preceding that, when he traveled to Moscow to negotiate an endorsement deal with a vodka company. Has civilization really declined to the point that people will take shopping advice from Iron Mike? Kind of makes you fear for the future of the species.

As TV, the harbinger of new vulgarities, slips further into a vast wasteland of schlock, lots of shows pair up well with consumer tips from Tyson. Can't you just see the commercial now? The camera takes in a scowling Tyson while a subtitle at the bottom of the screen reads "Former Baddest Man On The Planet." He pours himself a shot, tilts the bottle's label toward the camera, and snarls: "When I

PHOTO BY CHRISTOF KOEPSEL/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

No way Vitali was afraid of "The Rock"

want to get good and drunk, I always reach for the baddest vodka on the planet."

Steroids Aftermath?: A fond farewell to Vitali Klitschko, a formidable heavyweight and all-around good guy whose reign as champion was marred by a string of injuries. The steady drumbeat pounded out by Don King and his heavyweight pet Hasim Rahman that Vitali feared Rahman was about as plausible as *Rocky V*. A man who stood toe-to-toe with Lennox Lewis does not punk out from Rahman. It's worth noting though that Vitali was caught with banned substances in his system while training for the 1996 Olympics. Like most athletes caught red-handed, he claimed the steroids were administered without his knowledge. Maybe. But whatever his degree of complicity, it's legitimate to wonder whether that history of illicit chemicals and his body's tendency to crack under pressure are related.

Pass the Crow: I used to think Jeff Lacy was overrated. But he keeps improving, and after watching him go through tough Scott Pemberton like Patton through Belgium, I stand totally corrected.

Miraculous Rafael: After Juan Manuel Marquez and his trainer-manager Nacho Beristain nixed a rematch with Manny Pacquiao, promoter Bob Arum showed them the door. It takes money and effort to build up fighters, so it's reasonable for a promoter to expect them to seize their opportunities. But if putting up with Juan Manuel and Nacho was the price for hanging on to little brother Rafael, Arum should have paid it. Talents like Rafael come around only every 10 years or so. When's the last time you saw such a skilled, conditioned boxer who packs that kind of punch? With the heavyweight picture at a low point (Waltzing Byrd is our number-one contender), the sport will pull through these tough times only by focusing on standouts in other weight classes—fighters like Rafael and Floyd Mayweather, who, incidentally, is returning to Arum's Top Rank. Top Rank's Lee Samuels tells me they're making headway over there on putting a Mayweather-Zab Judah fight together. Let's hope it's a done deal by the time you read this.

Comebacks: Welcome back to Wladimir, who, according to conventional wisdom, was dwelling in the land of washed-up fighters before he vanquished Peter. And may George Foreman fill in on HBO again. He's a savvy analyst who notices significant details missed by many "experts" who deride him. Besides, he's a unique individual—and not just because he battled his way out of Houston's Fifth Ward to achieve fame and fortune. His most remarkable accomplishment was transforming himself from a heartless thug into a *mensch*—a person of character who shows genuine kindness to others.

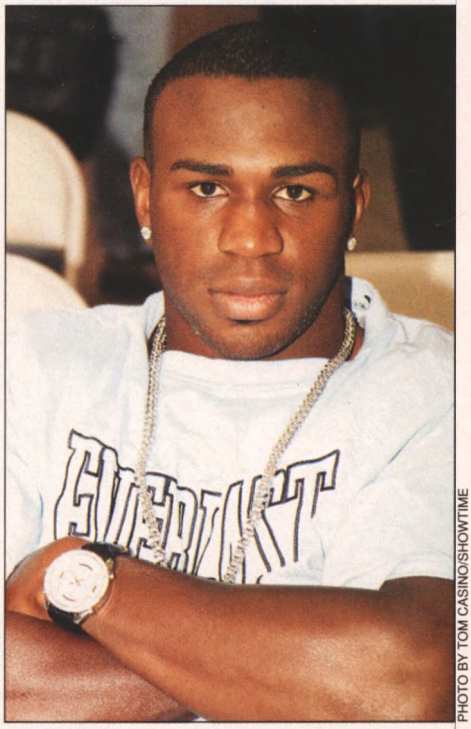


PHOTO BY TOM CASINO/SHOWTIME

■ *What you got to say for yourself now, Goldman?*

Camera Clicks

PHOTO BY KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES

PHOTO BY PETER KRAMER/GETTY IMAGES

Have you ever seen a less intimidating man in boxing gloves than Gilbert Gottfried? Luckily for Gottfried, he does his best work with his mouth, not his fists, and Don King was the comedian's target (and everyone else's) at a Friars Club Roast in late-October. It's just lucky for King that it was Gottfried and not a scorned former fighter of his who was given the free shot at the Hall of Fame promoter's chin.

We don't know about the "Peas" part, but we definitely know that Fergie is hanging out with the right guy if she wants to make the "Black-Eyed" element come true. The female vocalist for the Black-Eyed Peas arrived just in front of Mike Tyson at the launch party for R&B singer Usher's latest DVD. You have to say this for Mike: For a guy who's supposed to be bankrupt, he still sports some pretty nice threads.

PHOTO BY MARTIN ROSE BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

Your guess is as good as ours as to what Jack Kemp was doing hanging out with Axel Schulz and his wife, Patrizia, at a recent fight card in Hamburg. Okay, so it's not Kemp; it's former heavyweight contender and Muhammad Ali foe Karl Mildenberger. But when we look at Schulz, it's hard not to think of politicians, as it was some serious boxing politics that kept Schulz from becoming the heavyweight champion of the world against George Foreman in 1995.

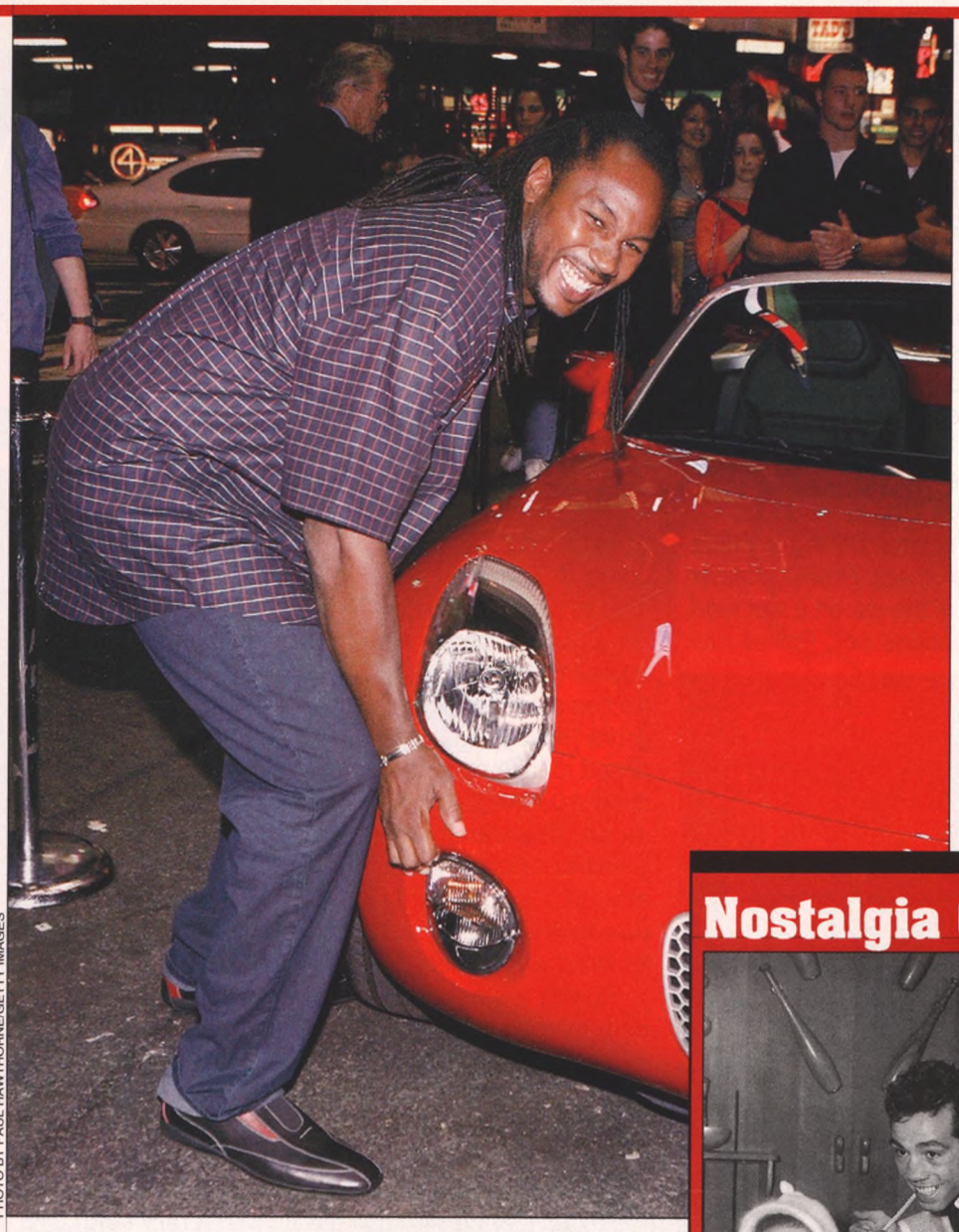


PHOTO BY PAUL HAWTHORNE/GETTY IMAGES

Looks to us like Lennox Lewis is training for a comeback. The former heavyweight champ was in New York recently for a Pontiac promotional event, getting out a bit of his pent-up aggression by trying to overturn cars. Of course, you can't quite tell because of where this picture cuts off, but Lewis' job was made considerably more difficult by the fact that Butterbean had just parked himself in the driver's seat.

PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

No, this isn't the promotional shot for Bob Arum's new angle on the Manny Pacquiao-Erik Morales rematch, titled "Interest Is Flagging" to reflect the effect of the Morales-Zahir Raheem fight. In fact, interest in Morales-Pacquiao II remains strong despite "El Terrible's" slip-up against Raheem, thanks in large part to the massive Filipino and Mexican contingents that make every fight either of these guys has a blockbuster.

Nostalgia Corner

Training was obviously a family affair for the DeMarcos, as daughter Patricia and wife Betty join Papa Paddy for a shipboard workout during their voyage to France for a 1955 the former lightweight champ's bout with Seraphin Ferrer. But despite the fact that the entire DeMarco family was clearly pulling together, Paddy was kayoed in five rounds.

By Joe Santoliquito

Sechew Powell Junior Middleweight

The first thing they did was take a quick inventory to make sure no one was hurt. No cuts. No bruises. No broken limbs. No blood on the seats or carpets. Good. Aside for their frayed nerves and bulging eyes—and the back of their rent-a-car, which was wedged into a telephone pole—everyone was intact.

So much for the brief trip that was to introduce Sechew Powell to boxing for the first time. Driving to the fabled Gleason's Gym with his brothers, Powell's father, Novric, momentarily lost control of the car on a wet road, sending it careening into a telephone poll. Powell took this all as a sign, because immediately after the accident, his father unhinged the car from the poll, parked it by the side of the road, gathered everyone up, and hailed a cab. They were going to Gleason's no matter what. The crew left at 1 p.m. from their home in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn for a drive that was supposed to take no longer than 30 minutes. Instead, they finally arrived at Gleason's at around 7 p.m.—partly due to the cabbie not knowing where Gleason's was.

PHOTO BY ED MULHOLLAND

Pro Record

2002		
Aug. 17	Aundalen Sloan, Atlantic City, NJ	KO 2
Sept. 13	Julio Cesar Montero, Braintree, MA	KO 2
Oct. 13	Jonathan Taylor, New York, NY	W 4
Nov. 23	Larry Brothers, Atlantic City	W 4
2003		
Jan. 10	Bill Tipton, Uncasville, CT	KO 2
March 6	Andres Filiberto Larrinaga, Miami, FL	KO 5
March 20	Sandro Haro, Glen Burnie, MD	KO 5
April 26	Jamal Harris, Mashantucket, CT	W 6
Aug. 8	Terry Clark, Little Rock, AR	KO 2
2004		
Jan. 9	James Johnson, Uncasville	KO 1
Feb. 26	Kirk Douglas, San Diego, CA	KO 1
April 22	Sergio Melendez, New York	KO 2
June 17	Grady Brewer, Laughlin, NV	W 8
Sept. 30	George Armenta, New York	W 10
2005		
Jan. 21	Patrick Thompson, Uncasville	W 8
May 6	Cornelius Bundrage, Mashantucket	KO 1
Aug. 25	Santiago Samaniego, New York	KO 3
Nov. 4	Archak TerMeliksetian, Miami, OK	W 10

FIGHTS	WON	LOST	DRAW	KOs
18	18	0	0	11

Powell learned about being fearless, patient, and determined all in one long afternoon—the first day he ever put gloves on and stepped into a ring. Those same characteristics have carried him to an undefeated 18-0 (11) record and gleaming hopes for a title shot sometime later this year.

The 26-year-old junior middleweight can point to the exact day his life took the spin—literally—hurdling him into boxing: April 20, 1990, the day of the accident. That happened 15 years ago, and the southpaw can still vividly recall every detail.

"I was looking forward to going to the gym that whole day, I was psyched about it, I couldn't wait to get out of school and go," Powell remembered. "We piled into the car, and about 15 minutes later the accident happened. I was in the backseat and everyone shuffled around a little. The impact made the accident look much worse than it was. I was a little kid, and I was afraid I was going to get hurt, because the car was spinning.

"I figured we wouldn't go the gym that day. But my dad is the kind of guy that once he starts something, he wants to finish it. That's kind of like me. My father is a stubborn guy."

So if Novric had to hoist his three boys up on himself and piggyback them to Gleason's, they were going to get there.

(Continued on Page 122)

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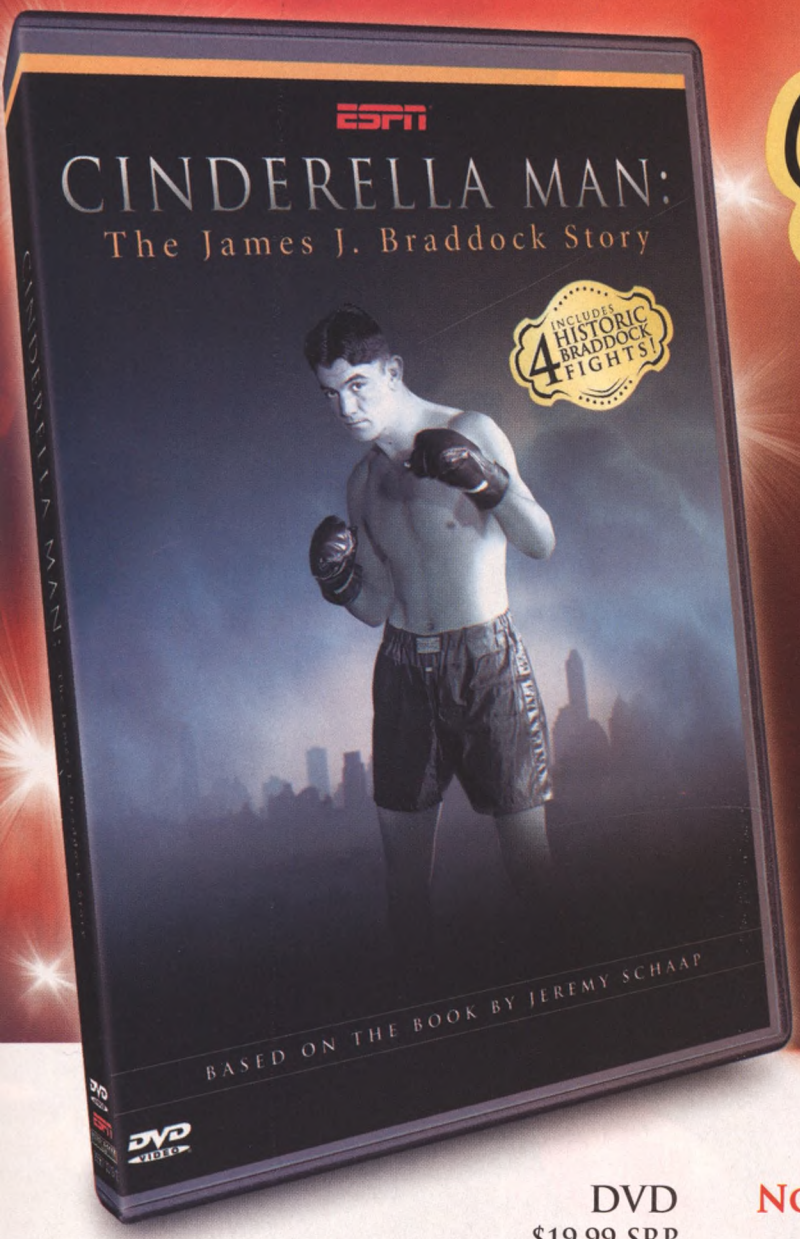

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LITSCHKO'S SUDDEN RETIREMENT

Is He Really Done? And Where Do We Go From Here?

PHOTO BY CHRISTOF KOEPSEL/ONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

By Eric Raskin

December 11, 2004. Vitali Klitschko KO 8 Danny Williams. The first defense of a long and memorable heavyweight championship reign.

At least that's what it was supposed to be. Who ever would have guessed it would actually be the *last* defense of one of the shortest, most forgettable reigns in history?

Eleven months, one thigh injury, one back injury, and one knee injury after

Klitschko seemed well on his way to a long reign as heavyweight champion when he clubbed Mike Tyson-conqueror Danny Williams into a TKO defeat in his first defense back in December 2004 (opposite page). But due to a series of injuries, Vitali hasn't fought since, and in November he announced his retirement.

PHOTO BY CHRISTOF KOEPSEL/ONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

Promoter Bob Arum had high hopes of revitalizing the heavyweight division when he outbid Don King to obtain the Klitschko-Hasim Rahman fight. But when Klitschko retired just nine days before the fight, the heavyweight division was suddenly without a major attraction or a viable star.

beating Williams, Klitschko announced his retirement from boxing, leaving the heavyweight division without a leader, without a moneymaker, without a rudder. Some expected him to prove a worthy successor to Lennox Lewis. But the only thing Klitschko's title reign shared with Lewis' was that it ended with a decision made by a fighter rather than a decision made by three judges or a referee.

For the second time in less than two years, the focal point of the heavyweight division has taken the focus off of himself and left boxing's big men in disarray. Of course, it's not the same with Klitschko as it was with Lewis, since Klitschko wasn't universally recognized as the champion, and hadn't yet established himself as a major pay-per-view draw—not even on par with Lewis, who himself did not exactly share wall space in the PPV pantheon with Mike Tyson or Oscar De La Hoya. Klitschko was not the superstar savior of the heavyweight division, at least not yet. But he was the closest thing we'd had since Lewis hung up his gloves in February 2004, and with his knockout power, his drawing power in the New York and Los Angeles markets (not to mention in Germany and parts of the former Soviet Union), and, yes, his pigmentation power, Klitschko might have been the white man—oops, we mean the *right* man—for the job.

And yet, at 34 years of age, after just one defense of the RING and WBC titles he won after Lewis vacated them, Klitschko, feeling his body was breaking down on him, called it quits. He was originally supposed to defend against Hasim Rahman on April 30, but suffered a thigh injury while jogging and had to postpone the fight. The new date was June 18, but Vitali's thigh still wasn't healed a few weeks out, so he pushed it back again to July 23. But that date had to be scrapped when Klitschko hurt his back and needed to undergo minor surgery. So November 12 was the new date. And on November 3, just nine days from finally getting a piece of "The Rock" (and a payday that might have reached $10-million), Klitschko tore the ACL and meniscus in his right knee during sparring, requiring more surgery and yet another postponement. After the surgery, on Wednesday, November 9, 2005, Klitschko decided to make the postponement permanent.

"Lately, I have been spending more time with my injuries than with my opponents inside the ring," Klitschko said. "The decision to retire from professional sports was a very difficult one, one of the hardest I have ever had to make. I love boxing and am proud to be the WBC and RING heavyweight champion. But I would like to end my career at its peak so I am retiring now as the champion to clear the way for my successors."

The only heavyweight champions in history who've retired on top and resisted the lure to return were Gene Tunney, Rocky Marciano, and Lewis. Just three days after retiring, Klitschko was already speaking of shortening that list back down to just Tunney and

Marciano, saying a bout with Lewis is the only thing that might change his mind.

Bob Arum, who was to promote Klitschko-Rahman, has his opinion on the matter, and expressed it bluntly to Klitschko over the phone the evening before the Ukrainian told the world of his retirement plans.

"I counseled him that he shouldn't retire—that he should vacate the title and leave it in limbo just in case something should happen," Arum said. "He said, 'No,' that he wanted to retire because he was 34, his body was betraying him, with the back injury, with the thigh injury, and he loved the sport of boxing but didn't want to put up with these betrayals with his own body ... One thing he kept reiterating in this phone call we had was how sorry he was, how he knew how hard we all worked to make the promotion a success."

It sounds like, at least to a certain extent, Klitschko's decision was influenced by the emotions of the moment. And emotional decisions are not necessarily lasting ones.

"It's so sudden, and it seems so impulsive, that you'd have to speculate that he will be back," guessed HBO's Jim Lampley, who called Klitschko's last four fights. "I was extremely surprised by the retirement announcement. He's a prideful man, and you don't expect anybody with that kind of pride to accept that his body has reached that point. I know Vitali is very frustrated. He's frustrated for himself, he's frustrated for Rahman, he's frustrated on behalf of the whole sport. I'm sure it bothered him to realize that he was holding up the fights that fans wanted to see. But it would seem highly possible that three or four months from now, his knee will be mostly healed, and he'll realize there's still a ton of business to be done. He'll realize one fight with Rahman, or another top heavyweight, would put him right back where he was."

But, for the sake of discussion, let's take Klitschko at his word. Let's assume he has ducked through the ropes for the last time. What kind of legacy has the 6'8" "Dr. Ironfist" established? Clearly, the only time he would merit mention alongside Tunney, Marciano, and Lewis is when listing men who retired as champ. He is far from a legend, far from a great champion, far from worthy of Hall of Fame consideration.

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

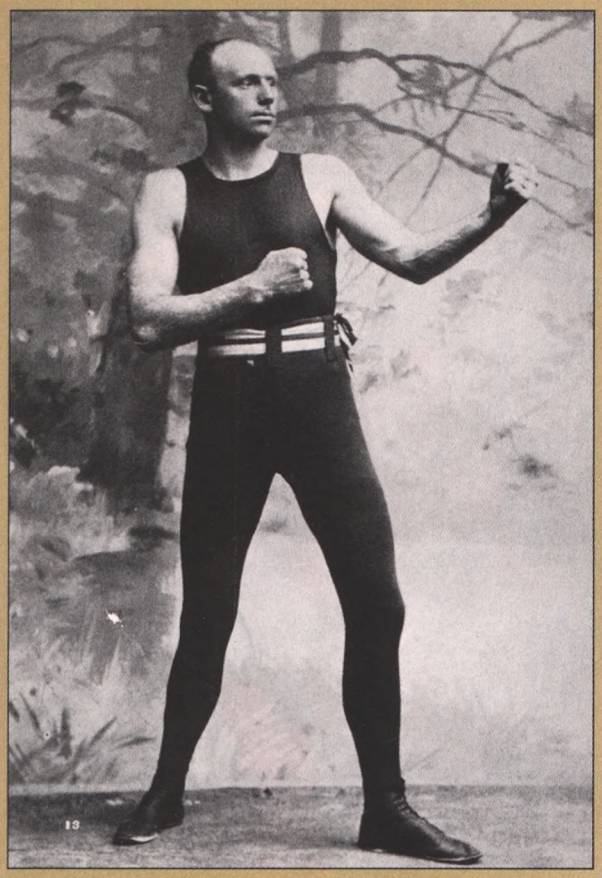
Chris Byrd, pictured ramming a left jab into Jameel McCline's forehead, still has the IBF strap, but his most recent outing, a 12-round decision over DaVarryl Williamson, was so boring, there is little public demand for Byrd's services.

REIGNS IN VAIN

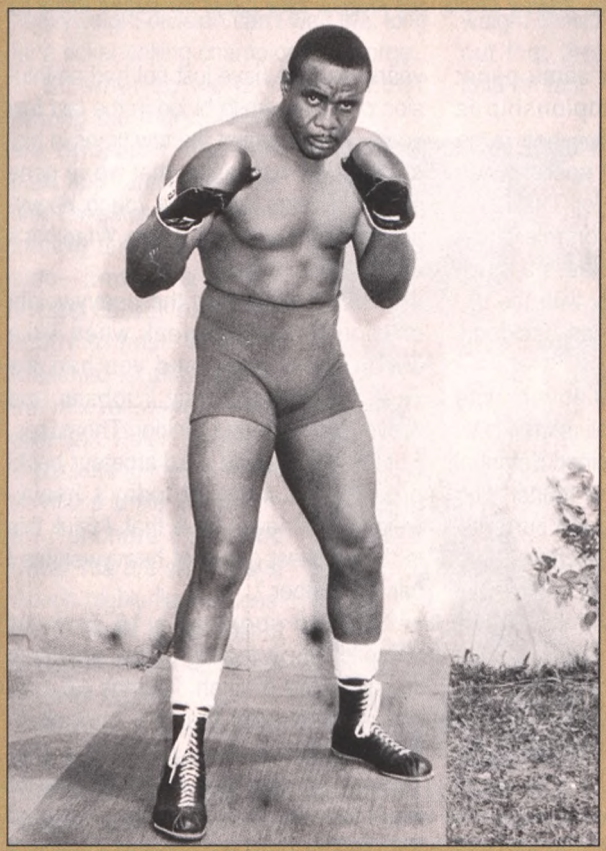
Before you hit Klitschko with the title of "worst heavyweight champion ever," take a look at how many other champs made as few or fewer successful title defenses. Of course, if we included all alphabet heavyweight titlists, we'd have a list that would be hard to fit on one page, but even looking only at fighters who held undisputed and/or "linear" titles, there were plenty whose reigns left as much to be desired as Klitschko's did.

FIGHTER	NUMBER OF DEFENSES	MONTHS AS CHAMP	ANALYSIS
Bob Fitzsimmons	0	27	*167-pounder took his sweet time between kayo of Jim Corbett and loss to Jim Jeffries*
Marvin Hart	0	7	*The first totally forgettable heavyweight champ, he beat Jack Root for the vacant title and lost it to Tommy Burns*
Jess Willard	1	51	*Nothing like a heavyweight champ who waits more than three years between title defenses*
Max Schmeling	1	24	*The only man to win heavyweight title on a foul would do his most noteworthy work after reign ended*
Jack Sharkey	0	12	*Giving away 60 pounds, "The Boston Gob" made a Primo Carnera title reign a reality*
Max Baer	0	12	*A disappointing champ with talent and marketability but not enough discipline or desire*
Jimmy Braddock	0	24	*Thanks to Russell Crowe and Ron Howard, his legacy will exceed his pugilistic accomplishments*
Jersey Joe Walcott	1	14	*It took him five tries to win the title, and just one perfect punch from Rocky Marciano to separate him from it*
Ingemar Johansson	0	12	*The Patterson fights were fun, though Ingo is cited now as an example of how wide the Hall of Fame's gates are*
Sonny Liston	1	17	*For a fighter many put in the all-time heavyweight top 10, his reign was quite brief*
Buster Douglas	0	8	*Yes, he ate his way out of the title, but could he have pulled off back-to-back wins over Tyson and Holyfield anyway?*
Evander Holyfield	0	5	*His first reign was solid, but second spanned only from Riddick Bowe rematch to upset loss to Michael Moorer*
Michael Moorer	0	7	*On the plus side, he won title from a legend (Holyfield) and looked great for the first nine rounds of his reign*
Shannon Briggs	0	4	*Most people conveniently forget he ever was linear champ, as he held no alphabet belts and began reign with unpopular decision*
Hasim Rahman	0	7	*Might have been a longer reign if judge hadn't ruled in Lennox Lewis' favor, preventing defense against David Izon*

—ER



Fitzsimmons never made a successful defense



Liston make just one successful defense

Klitschko's record reads 35-2 (34). That "34" is a hell of a number. And there are some good fighters among the "34": Kirk Johnson, Corrie Sanders, Williams, Larry Donald, Vaughn Bean, Herbie Hide. Several of them were never knocked out by anyone else, but fell at the feet of the towering Klitschko. But the "34" isn't the number that matters with Klitschko. For better and for worse, it's the "2." Klitschko is a fighter who will be defined by his two losses.

He was branded "Quitschko" (and the less clever but more amusing "Dr. No Balls") following his first pro defeat, against Chris Byrd in April 2000. Vitali led comfortably on the cards through nine rounds, but stayed on the stool when the bell sounded for the 10th, citing a shoulder injury. Klitschko was brought up in boxing to do the cautiously smart thing rather than the recklessly brave thing, so he had no idea at the time how detrimental that decision would be to his career. He was ridiculed. He was dismissed. It took him three years to get back on American TV, and even then, he only got his shot because of a last-minute injury to Lennox Lewis' scheduled opponent, Kirk Johnson. But Klitschko made the most of his second chance, waging a courageous and bloody war with Lewis, only to lose on a TKO due to his grotesque lacerations while leading the heavyweight champion on the cards.

On the negative side, Klitschko's two most famous fights were both losses. On the positive side, those two defeats both came against elite opponents, and Vitali was winning both fights. They mirrored, in certain respects, Klitschko's title reign. They started so well, there was so much promise, but ultimately, injuries got in the way.

Klitschko had such great momentum going in 2003 and 2004. He followed the Lewis fight with a perfect two-round performance against Johnson. Then he avenged his brother Wladimir's loss to Sanders, claiming the heavyweight title in the highest rated HBO fight since his battle with Lewis 10 months earlier. Then he beat down Williams. His fights were exciting. His wins were conclusive. His flaws were there to be picked at too,

PHOTO BY MARTIN ROSE/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

Lamon Brewster flattens Luan Krasniqi's nose en route to a ninth-round TKO in Hamburg, Germany. Despite losses to Charles Shufford and Cliff Etienne earlier in his career, Brewster's recent victories over Wladimir Klitschko, Andrew Golota, and Krasniqi have raised his stature within the industry and positioned him well for a run at the title.

of course, but on the whole, everything was headed in the right direction.

And then it was over.

"His impact on the division becomes something like that of a Max Baer," Lampley said. "Like Baer, he came along, he was there for a moment, he looked the part, and then he was gone."

Perhaps the most controversial element of Klitschko's title reign was the recognition he got as the division's *real* champion, both officially from THE RING, and unofficially from HBO. Initially, when Klitschko (then ranked number one by virtually everyone) claimed the vacant RING title by beating Sanders (then ranked number three by THE RING but not necessarily by everyone), many fans were comfortable with the notion of Klitschko as champion and with the way THE RING followed its previously established criteria. But as the reign dragged on unimpressively, the voices of the dissenters grew, creating an uncomfortable situation for the editors of this magazine.

Now we're all on the same page: The heavyweight championship is vacant, and anyone with a belt is no more than a "titlist." That spells a less uncomfortable situation for THE RING, but an extremely uncomfortable situation for all of boxing, and that's a much bigger concern. Especially with the so-called "glamour" division as decidedly unglamorous as it is.

"The heavyweight division was already a mess before Vitali retired. Now it's an advanced mess," opined Emanuel Steward, the Hall of Fame trainer who briefly worked with Vitali and currently works with Wladimir Klitschko. "The problem is, there's no talent coming out of the amateur system. And that comes back to the fact that our kids don't get exposure in the amateurs on TV. You used to hear people say, 'I saw Cassius Clay win the gold medal on TV. I saw Sugar Ray Leonard win the gold medal on TV. I saw the Americans against the Russians on ABC.' That's how kids got into it. But we haven't had amateur boxing on TV on a regular basis in 20-some years. And we have just not had an infusion of young, fresh blood in the last few years. This is one of the few times in history this has happened, that we've gone so many years without a young heavyweight coming along. Even Wladimir's 29 now, he's no baby.

"They always said the heavyweight division was really weak when Mike Tyson came along and you had the Greg Pages and Tony Tubbses and Trevor Berbicks and Pinklon Thomases. But those guys had solid amateur backgrounds. So many of today's heavyweights don't even have that. I think this is the weakest group of heavyweights I can remember."

Steward spoke of a 16-year-old prospect who's tearing up the amateurs by the name of Isiah Thomas (at 6'3", he's already taller than his basketball-playing namesake), predicting that Thomas will be a gold-medal favorite for the U.S. in the 2008 Olympics. But even if it turns out just as Steward expects it will, Thomas won't be a serious contender as a pro until at least 2010 or

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Nigerian slugger Samuel Peter has excited fans with his go-for-broke style, but probably has too many flaws to become world champion. Still, his heavy-handed attack gives him the proverbial puncher's chance against any of the current crop of heavyweights.

And Toney does seem to be headed for a major fight early in 2006 against Rahman, perhaps kicking off a series of the best fighting the best (Brock vs. Tua and Byrd vs. Wladimir Klitschko were also being discussed as of press time). If the best fight the best enough, eventually a new RING champion, and hopefully a universally recognized champion, will emerge.

But how bad of a shape is the division in when it's most realistic hope is a 37-year-old former middleweight who failed a postfight drug test in his last title fight?

Vitali Klitschko, you picked a rotten time to leave us. For your sake, we'd love to see you join the short list that includes Tunney, Marciano, and Lewis. But for the heavyweight division's sake, we'd like to point out that there's always room on the long list too. ■

2011. We're talking five years. The heavyweight division can't wait that long for a ticket-selling champion to emerge.

So what do we have right now? Among the four beltholders, Byrd, John Ruiz, Rahman, and Lamon Brewster, only Brewster really seems to have any long-term upside—and he's a guy whose career has been spotty at best. Wladimir Klitschko is also back in the mix following his win over Sam Peter, though it's impossible to feel confident in Vitali's brittle little brother. Punchers Peter and David Tua are still players, though highly flawed ones. Calvin Brock is the best of the unbeatens, but he still has a lot to prove.

If there's one fighter who can (a) potentially beat everybody else who matters, and (b) make the general public pay attention, it's James Toney.

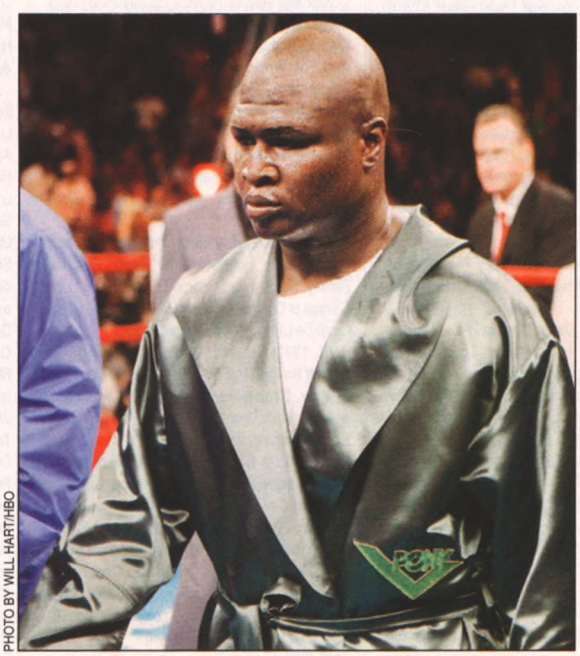


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Is it possible that James Toney, a former middleweight titleholder, is our best bet for a formidable heavyweight champion? He would already have a belt if he hadn't tested positive for steroids after outpointing John Ruiz, but will probably get another chance at a belt if his mooted bout with Rahman actually happens.

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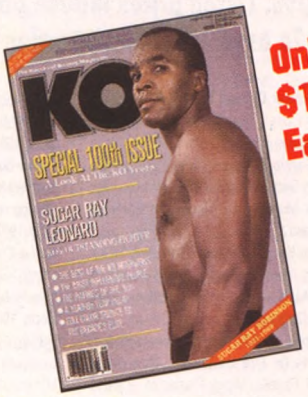

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May 1989: The Best Of '88. Plus: Year-end awards, Evander Holyfield, Pryor-Morales, Fenech-Navarro.

Feb. 1990: Mike Tyson: Riddick Bowe & Ray Mercer Take Aim. Plus: Bobby Czyz, Gerry Cooney, Chuck Wepner, Antonio Esparragoza, Roman-Laciar.

March 1990: The '80s—Great Fights, Great Fighters (color). Plus: Jeff Harding, Evander Holyfield, Pete Rademacher, Sharkey-McCoy.

April 1990: Pernell Whitaker: Fighter Of The Year (color). Plus: Tiger Flowers, Duran-Leonard, Chavez-Taylor preview, Jorge Paez, Ali-Cooper.

May 1990: Big George Talks Tough: "Tyson Won't Be That Difficult!" Plus: Ed Hopson, Russian fighters, grudge wars, Archie Moore, Kid Berg, Marcel Cerdan, Chavez-Cortes.

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July 1990: "I'm Hungrier Than Ever Before," By Evander Holyfield. Plus: James Toney, Buddy McGirt, Glenwood Brown, Aaron Davis, Michael Carbajal, Jorge Paez, Kid Gavilan, Mark Breland, Ali-Liston II (color).

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Nov. 1996: Pole-Axed! Low Blows, Sinking Bowe, Ugly Show. Plus: Bowe-Golota I, Blinky Palermo, exciting fighters, Winky Wright, Joe Brown.

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Fall 2004: Trinidad vs. Mayorga: Comeback Or Calamity. Also: Vitali Klitschko, Marco Antonio Barrera, Juan Diaz, Jimmy Clabby.

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Winter 2005: 1980s vs. Today: Comparing The Middleweight Superstars. Also: Roy Jones, Leija-Gatti preview, Terry Downes, comebacks.

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Out Of Reality And Into The Real World

THE CONTENDER REMATCH CONTROVERSY

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Although the fighters who won the first bouts were victorious again in the rematches, both results were controversial. Peter Manfredo, pictured clocking Sergio Mora with a left hook (above) fought much better in the rematch, only to drop a questionable eight-round split decision to "The Latin Snake." Anthony Bonsante, pictured drilling an onrushing Jessie Brinkley with a left (below) was stopped by Brinkley the first time, but did enough in the rematch to convince many he was robbed.

By Eric Raskin

Nothing sells a prime-time TV drama show to the masses quite like a buzz-worthy water-cooler question. In the '80s, we had "Who shot J.R.?" In the '90s, it was "Who killed Laura Palmer?" Now we can add another one to that list: "Who won Mora-Manfredo II?"

Granted, Sergio Mora, Peter Manfredo, and the "reality" television show that made them famous, *The Contender*, didn't reach an audience quite as large as those reached by *Dallas* or *Twin Peaks*. But by boxing standards, the first season of *The Contender* made a huge impression, connecting with anywhere from six million households for an average episode to twice that many for the season finale on NBC. The rematch of the finale's main event, pitting *Contender* "champion" Sergio Mora against Peter Manfredo, aired live on ESPN on October 15, and even though the start was delayed 55 minutes by a college football game, meaning the Mora-Manfredo fight didn't begin until 1:30 a.m. on the East Coast, the ratings were the best for boxing on ESPN since 1998. More than 1.2 million homes tuned in. And that sizeable audience was treated to an entertaining boxing program—and two of the most controversial decisions of the year.

You can take the reality-show fighters out of the reality-show setting, but even in the

PHOTO BY JAN SANDER S

PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

There was no controversy surrounding Alfonso Gomez' fourth-round TKO of Luciano Perez, who was not part of the first season of The Contender. *The popular Gomez was overwhelmed by the tremendous reception he was given by an enthusiastic crowd of more than 10,000 at the Staples Center.*

real world of boxing, you can't get away from the soap-opera-like drama. Mora retained his belt via eight-round split decision in a fight in which he was badly cut in round one (ultimately requiring 29 stitches) and frequently outworked, but also rallied in key spots and landed most of the fight's more noteworthy powershots. This was one of those fights where two people sitting right next to each other could disagree strongly over what they saw, and with ESPN analyst and unofficial scorer Teddy Atlas seeing a fight controlled by eventual loser Manfredo and communicating those feelings to the masses, a controversy was born.

Just prior to Mora-Manfredo II, an undeniably real controversy—one that you couldn't possibly pin on the color commentary—shrouded the co-featured bout of the evening. In a rematch to one of the quarterfinal fights from the *Contender* series, Anthony Bonsante was busier and better than Jesse Brinkley in their five-rounder, winning all five rounds on Atlas' scorecard. And even if that 50-45 score was a stretch, at least Atlas had the right guy winning. Judges Julie Lederman, Fritz Werner, and Raul Caiz somehow *all* had the wrong guy winning, scoring the fight for Brinkley. The audience reaction at Staples Center in Los Angeles went from silent disbelief to chants of "Bulls___!" and Bonsante went from entering the ring to boos to being overwhelmingly embraced as he took a "victory" lap around the arena.

Reality competition shows, like boxing matches, purport to feature unscripted entertainment, the validity of which is often questioned by skeptics. At this card marrying the two redheaded stepchildren of the televised competition world, the *reality* was that there was reason for skepticism. And Bonsante was justified in being not just skeptical, but downright angry.

"I don't know what the hell the judges were watching," Bonsante told THE RING a few days later. "Ten-thousand people in that arena knew I won, 1.2 million people watching on TV know I won. The only people that didn't think I won were the three judges. Even Jesse knew I won; you could see by the look on his face after the fight ended."

To hardened boxing fans, such an outrageous decision can be dismissed as just another in a long line of scorecard calamities, but *Contender* fans are

PHOTO COURTESY OF ESPN/THE CONTENDER

Reality TV guru Mark Burnett made the deal for a second season of The Contender *while on a white-water rafting trip with an ESPN executive.*

As referee Raul Caiz Sr. lifts Mora's arm in victory (above), a dejected Manfredo hangs his head. Ironically, Manfredo's hometown of Providence, Rhode Island, drew the largest rating of any city in the United States. It's unlikely, however, that the disputed decision will lessen Manfredo's popularity among New England fans.

PHOTOS BY JAN SANDERS

not necessarily hardened boxing fans, and the impact on them is more profound. If this was only the second live fight card you ever watched (the initial-season finale being the first), and you saw an outrageous decision and a questionable decision among three fights (good thing Alfonso Gomez conclusively stopped non-*Contender* Luciano Perez in the show opener), you'd probably come away thinking boxing is every bit as dirty as you always heard it was.

And there's another wrinkle to the impact on the fans of a bad decision in a *Contender* fight: They actually harbor personal feelings for these fighters due to the way the reality show was presented, and they could potentially take the results of the fights somewhat personally. When Bonsante gets screwed, you don't just see another pug who's had a loss added to his record. You see the guy in the "#1 Daddy" hat, and you think of how the loss affects his two kids, how it keeps him in a certain earnings bracket that means he has to keep working his third-shift blue-collar job. When the Mora-Manfredo fight ends in controversy, you don't just shrug it off. If you invested in the show week after week from March to May, you're either a Mora fan or a Manfredo fan at this point, and you care deeply about whether the right guy got the duke.

"There are questionable rulings in every sport," noted Ron Wechsler, the senior director of development for ESPN Original Entertainment. "That same week as those fights, we had the

dropped third strike controversy in the White Sox-Angels playoff game, we had a questionable ending in the USC-Notre Dame football game. Do these sort of things happen more in boxing than in other sports? Maybe. One of the greatest challenges with boxing gaining acceptance is the way it's perceived."

Wechsler is a lifelong boxing fan who watched *The Contender* religiously on NBC and helped spearhead ESPN's move to save the show after the Peacock Network chose not to give reality-TV guru Mark Burnett and company a second chance.

"The minute I heard that the series might not get picked up by NBC, I was on the phone to Mark Shapiro (ESPN's then-Executive Vice President of Programming and Production, who has since left the network)," Wechsler said. "Before long, Burnett and Shapiro went on a white-water rafting trip together, which is not atypical of how a business meeting is done in this business. We went into that trip with interest, and we came out of it with a handshake deal. It all came together pretty quickly, just a couple of weeks. I think it was just a marriage that made a lot of sense."

No question about it, putting a reality show centered around boxing on a network that actually broadcasts boxing on a regular basis was a natural. Everybody is pleased with the ratings for the first ESPN/*Contender* collaboration, and two more live shows are planned before the second season of the reality show kicks off on this summer (*see sidebar on page 48 for more details*).

While the ESPN suits and Burnett and his partners (Jeffrey Katzenberg, Sylvester Stallone, and Sugar Ray Leonard) are all pleased with those ratings numbers, it's a different kind of number that all of the fighters currently promoted by Tournament of Contenders are pleased with. The fighters are looking at a number with a dollar sign in front of it, and they're liking what they see in terms of purse minimums in their promotional contracts.

"The contracts vary, some are for multi-year, some are for one fight," said Steven Rivera, the promotional director for Tournament of Contenders. "The multi-years are typical to a normal boxing contract—we guarantee we'll get you at least three fights a year. These are guys with purse minimums that normal fighters with their records wouldn't have. These are *very* generous minimums."

The most Manfredo ever made for a fight prior to his *Contender* experience was $15,000—and he was one of the most established fighters on the show. Now his purse minimum is $100,000 per fight. Mora's is the same. Gomez and Brinkley, who lost in the semifinals on the first season of *The Contender*, pull down minimums of $75,000. Bonsante, a quarterfinalist, has a $25,000 minimum in his contract.

"I'm just euphoric about my contract," said Mora, who also took home a tidy $1-million prize for his first-place finish in Season One. "It's great money, plus millions of people get to watch my career. To instill in people what fighting's all about, that's the main thing."

Of course, not everyone was offered as much money as those guys, and some of the fighters have chosen not to be promoted by the *Contender* people. Ishe Smith was the most outspoken opponent of the show and the contracts, turning down reported $50,000 minimums because he said he wanted "real fights," rather than five-rounders against the same assortment of opponents. Ahmed Kaddour, Joey Gilbert, Jimmy Lange, and Tarick Salmaci all went their own ways as well after being offered lower-end minimums—lower-end minimums that would still represent career-high paydays for some of them.

"I can't understand why people would want to break free from the show," Bonsante said, "because where else are they going to get this exposure and get paid what they do? Ishe's a great boxer, with a lot of potential and a lot of skill, but to do what he did and say what he did, he stabbed himself in the back."

If Smith's life hasn't necessarily been changed for the better by *The Contender*, then that seems to leave him in the minority. From money to overnight fame to opportunity, most of the contestants are very pleasantly surprised by what the show has done for them.

"I was undefeated before the show, I got three losses on my record now, and it was absolutely worth it," said the

FROM THE CONTENDER TO TITLE CONTENDERS?

We can all unanimously agree that the fighters on the FOX boxing reality show The Next Great Champ *are never going to live up to the billing of their show's title. But with its more modest title and more talented cast, can* The Contender *produce actual contenders?*

Fighting in the rather shallow middleweight division, where virtual unknowns Sebastian Sylvester and Scott Dann are ranked in The Ring*'s top 10, Sergio Mora, undefeated and riding a streak of four straight wins over Ishe Smith, Jesse Brinkley, Peter Manfredo, and Manfredo again, is already knocking on the door of top-10 contender status. You could argue, in fact, that the only thing keeping Mora out right now is the fact that those fights were all five-, seven-, or eight-rounders.*

Mora is eager to step up the competition and step up the length of the fights to prove he belongs.

"You can expect my next fight to be someone outside The Contender*, a name guy, maybe a top-10-ranked guy," Mora said. "I want to fight a 10-round fight, and eventually a 12-round fight—because that means it's a championship fight. Fighting other guys from* The Contender*, that stops now, that's it. We gotta branch out."*

Joe Tessitore, the ESPN blow-by-blow broadcaster who worked Mora-Manfredo II, believes Mora and Manfredo can both become legitimate middleweight contenders soon—though not necessarily because he's overwhelmed by their respective abilities.

"To me, it has more to do with the fight opportunities that certain Contender *alumni get," Tessitore explained. "Let's not forget that Peter Manfredo was starting to knock on the door of fringe-contender status when he took part in the show. Peter was fighting 10-rounders and was unbeaten. If he can get a fight with a top-10 guy and pull off a win, then yes, of course he is going to be in the top 10. I'm not saying he will win that fight, but if he gets the chance, anything can happen."*

Mora and Manfredo aren't the only fighters from the show with top-10 potential, however. Smith holds a win over David Estrada, a fighter who is currently rated by The Ring *at welterweight. Fighting at either 147 or 154, instead of the* Contender *weight of 160 pounds, Smith could make some noise.*

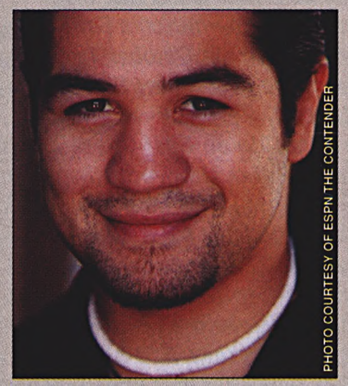


PHOTO COURTESY OF ESPN THE CONTENDER

ESPN blow-by-blow man Joe Tessitore thinks Gomez can become a star

And speaking of fighters who weren't competing at the correct weight on the reality show, perhaps the boxer who could go the farthest of them all is Alfonso Gomez. He's really a welterweight, and though he fought at 149 pounds on October 15, he said he should have no trouble getting down to 147 in the future.

"Alfonso Gomez has proven that he can be a star," Tessitore said. "He has a good style to attract viewers and live fans. Plus he is clearly a late bloomer who gets better every time out. Add in the fact that Gomez—like Mora—has the Latino Southern California fan base getting on board, and the recipe for stardom is already in the mixing bowl and headed toward the baking pan."

"I'd rather be a fighter people love and want to see fight than be a world champion who nobody cares about," Gomez said.

Of course, in a perfect world, you'd like to see fighters whom people love and want to see fight become world champions who people do care about. Nobody's arguing that Mora, Manfredo, or Gomez are there yet. But all three of them just celebrated their 25th birthdays in late-2005. So it's far too soon to rule out the possibility that a Contender *might just become the "next great champ."*

—ER

tremendously likable Manfredo. "I've gained a ton of popularity, I've met a lot of great people; I meet celebrities. I was surprised how much I got recognized in L.A. You go to L.A., you figure there are a lot of celebrities, and you don't think people are going to notice you, but they do. I'm the type of person, I believe it when I see it. So I knew it was possible that I'd become this well-known, but I didn't really believe it until it started happening."

"I can honestly say that everywhere I go, people recognize me," Gomez agreed. "I knew *The Contender* was going to provide me with a big break, but I never realized it would be like this. To have 10,000 people at Staples Center screaming, yelling, euphoric—they wouldn't even be that way for world champions."

Bonsante, who isn't making quite as much money as Manfredo or Gomez, hasn't had his life changed quite as dramatically. He still goes to work at 10 p.m. because he still can't completely support himself, his son, and his daughter on his boxing income. But at the same time, *The Contender* has opened its share of doors for him. He was offered $10,000 to put his "#1 Daddy" hat on eBay, and though he turned that offer down, he is in talks to produce replicas of the hat and market them.

And as a single dad, he has noticed other benefits of being "Anthony from *The Contender*":

"Since *The Contender*, I have not had any problems getting dates," Bonsante acknowledged with a laugh.

One thing all of the fighters we spoke to for this article agreed on was that the reality show depicted them accurately.

"I'm pleased with how I came across on *The Contender*, because I came across how I actually am," Manfredo said. "If Ishe came across as a villain, it's because he was a villain. They do edit, but they can't put words in your mouth. Everything you say on the show, you said. Everything you do, you did."

Unfortunately for Manfredo, everything he did he came out one step behind Mora. Manfredo finished in second place on the reality show, and he finished in second place—at least officially—on October 15 at the Staples Center. And to think, "The Latin Snake" very nearly passed up the opportunity that would lead him to boxing stardom.

"I didn't really know how big of an opportunity this might be, so I wasn't even going to bother with it," Mora recalled. "But it was like, I had nothing better going on, so I gave it a try. And when we get there, and Sly and Ray are talking about how big it's going to be, people like me and Alfonso, we were kind of like, 'Yeah, yeah.' We'd heard that kind of talk before.

"But it blew up. They did everything they said they would for us and more."■

PHOTO COURTESY OF ESPN/THE CONTENDER

Naturally, Mora, who won the $1-million prize the first season and earned a hefty purse for his rematch with Manfredo, is delighted by the way The Contender *has boosted his profile and advanced his career.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF ESPN/THE CONTENDER

Bonsante became famous during the first season due to his devotion to his children and the "#1 Daddy" cap he wore. In fact, he recently turned down a $10,000 offer to sell the cap on eBay.

THE CONTENDER CONTINUES ...

If there's one thing we know about Sylvester Stallone, it's that he can't resist the urge to make sequels. The* Rocky *franchise seemed to end with a thud 15 years ago. The* Rambo *series appeared to be complete 17 years ago. Yet both are continuing on. And if those two can both be resurrected so long after their apparent expiration date, then certainly* The Contender *is far from over.

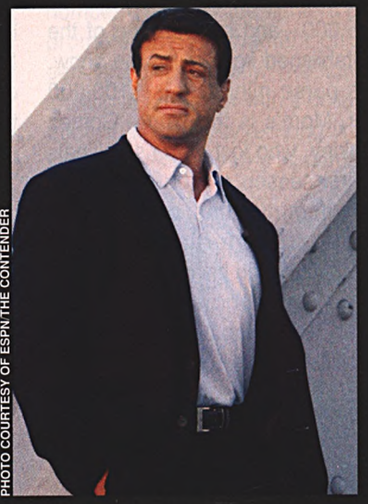


PHOTO COURTESY OF ESPN/THE CONTENDER

Stallone's penchant for successful sequels continues

Not only does the second season of the reality show start this summer, but ESPN has options to renew the series for two subsequent seasons. And the cable network is also planning at least two more live shows featuring* Contender *fighters prior to the start of the second season—one on a Saturday night, like the October 15 event, and one as a* Friday Night Fights *telecast.

"We might do an East Coast thing with Peter Manfredo, in Providence," said ESPN's Ron Wechsler, noting that the October 15 broadcast had far better ratings in the capital of Rhode Island than anywhere else in the country. Few details had been worked out as of our press deadline, though the possibility that* Contender *alumni would face opponents outside the reality show's cast was being strongly considered.

Casting calls for Season Two of* The Contender *ran in assorted cities throughout October, though as of the press time, the casting process was far from complete. Fighters as light as 135 pounds were being considered. And the size of the contestants isn't the only thing that rates to change from last season.

"Personally, the thing that I thought didn't work was the challenges," Wechsler said. "I felt like they were taking* Survivor *and forcing it into this show. People want to see more boxing, see more of the actual fights, more training, see what it takes to drop weight. We want to show more of the sport for our audience. But you still have to have a component of their family lives, obviously. What we want is a balance, a heightening of some of the sport elements, decreasing some of the family elements.

"We're partners in this thing with Burnett Productions. We tell them what works for our audience, and they've tended to listen so far. One example: It was very important for us to have the Mora-Manfredo rematch be eight rounds. At the very least, I want-rounder or a seven-rounder. Mark comes from a different perspective; he likes the shorter fights, because there's more urgency and more action. But when we're talking about a championship fight, it should really be at least eight rounds, maybe even 10 or 12. On the reality show, these guys might fight twice in two weeks, so it makes sense to stick with the five-round fights. But our championship fights will be eight rounds or more."

Wechsler is predicting ratings numbers somewhere between a 1.5 and a 2.5 for* The Contender *on ESPN, believing the show can do better than the football drama show* Playmakers, *which averaged a 2.0 and was considered a hit for the network. Obviously, the show's audience will be smaller than it was on NBC. But ESPN intends to treat* The Contender *better than its first home did.

"You have to give the audience a degree of consistency," Wechsler said, alluding to NBC airing the show on three different nights, at three different times, during its first week. "We want to give it a consistent time slot, with the least direct competition possible. And by direct competition, I mean not putting it up against, say, the NBA playoffs. The bottom line is that we want to give it the best possible chance to succeed.* The Contender *is a very high priority at ESPN."

—ER

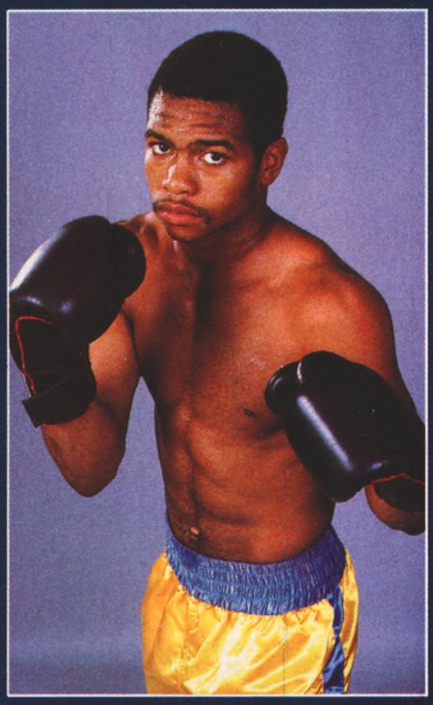


PHOTO BY AL BELLO

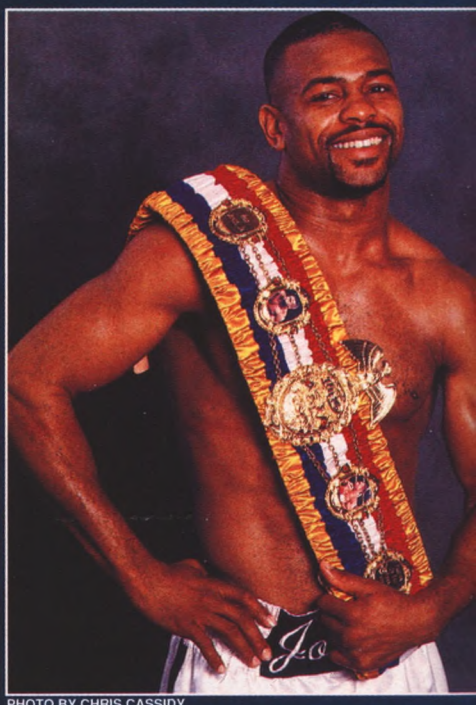
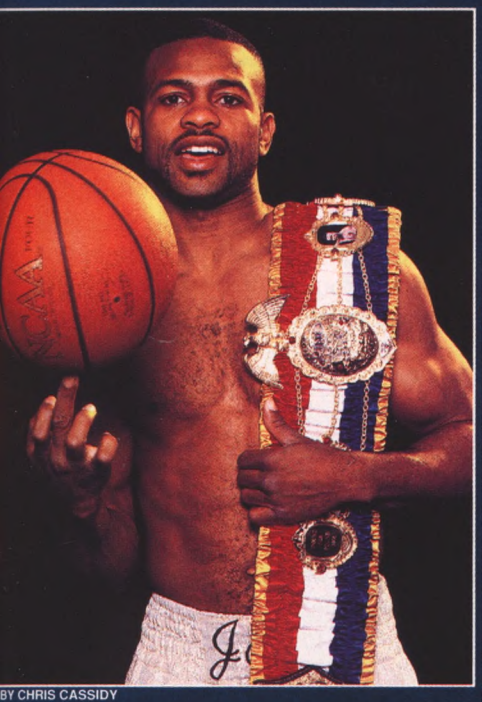


PHOTO BY CHRIS CASSIDY

A LOOK BACK AT ROY JONES

WHAT WAS ... WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN ... WHAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN



BY CHRIS CASSIDY

PHOTO BY CRAIG BLANENHORN/HBO

PHOTO BY KEVIN KNIGHT/HBO

The many looks of a gradually maturing Jones, starting in his pre-Olympic days back in 1988 (far left) and continuing right up until a publicity shot taken immediately before his match with John Ruiz in 2003 (far right). The one constant has been a magnificent physique.

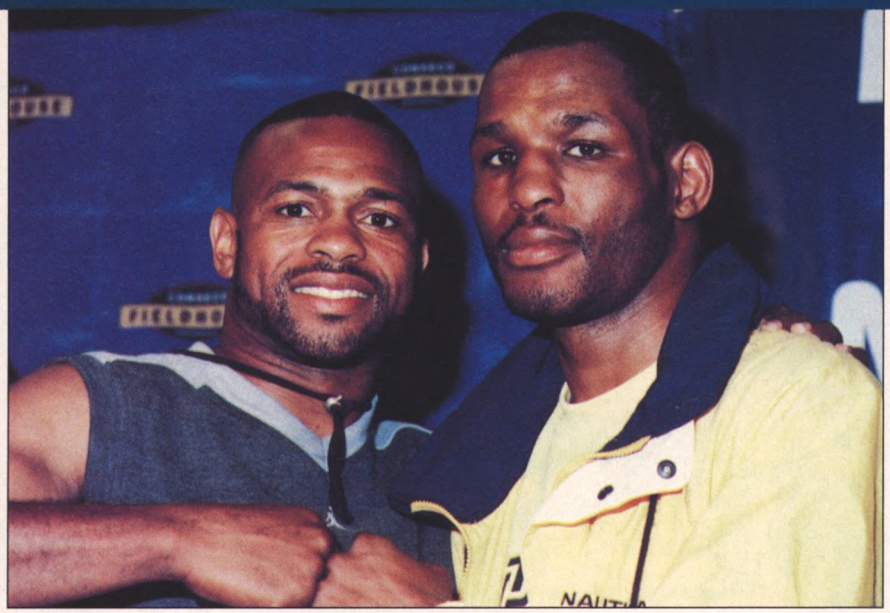
By William Dettloff

Based on comments he made in the days after his fairly dismal performance against Antonio Tarver in their rubber match, it seems clear that Roy Jones doesn't know yet that his days as a top prizefighter are over. Of course, that comes as no great surprise to anyone who's ever fallen for a fighter and then watched him age, become human and then impotent in the ring, and finally delusional. Fighters never know it. Try some time to convince someone of something they don't want to know. It's a hard road. And it takes a while.

Jones' denial of the obvious is ironic. For one who spent much of his career denying in action and deed that he was, indeed, a fighter—he'd rather we thought of him as an entertainer/performer/businessman—he now insists he *is* a fighter, and always has been. Critics might observe that over his long career, this last-gasp denial of one of nature's sad truths is one of the more fighterly things he's done.

Nevertheless, Jones is indeed done. Believe it. If he wasn't after Tarver stretched him in their rematch, if he wasn't after Glen Johnson pancaked him after that, then surely he is now, after fighting mostly just to last the distance against a surprisingly ineffectual Tarver. He can say he'll beat anyone but Tarver. Maybe he even believes it. But he can't. Not anymore. It's over.

That being the case, the rest of us now are free to rank and judge him appropriately, when nothing else can be done to change anything. It is only when a fighter is done that his career and accomplishments can be viewed in the proper context and weighed against the careers and accomplishments of the fighters that came before him and who did business at or around his weight.



Jones' first signature victory came over Bernard Hopkins (right) in May 1993 for the vacant IBF middleweight title. They are pictured together in 2000 when a rematch seemed a real possibility. But it never happened, and, barring a minor miracle, it probably never will.

And Jones is rather a special case; because of the sheer enormity of his talent he was placed by many alongside some of the sport's great figures. This engendered a backlash from those who saw in Jones something less than what is required to gain entrance to the pantheon.

Going by the numbers, Jones' greatness seems irrefutable: alphabet titles in four weight divisions, 17 title defenses overall, a four-year reign as the world light heavyweight champion, wins over two near-certain future Hall of Famers in Bernard Hopkins and James Toney, and roughly a six- or seven-year tenure as one of the two or three best prizefighters in the business. By any standard against that you care to measure, and in any profession, those kinds of accomplishments equal uncommon success. They equal, let's face it, greatness. There's no way around that.

There's this too: It could have been five weight divisions. Jones, 49-4 (38), could have decided at any point during his light heavyweight reign that he'd like to snatch a title at cruiserweight as well. And he would have. Who was there to oppose him? Vassiliy Jirov? Arthur Williams? Juan Carlos Gomez? He'd have been a heavy favorite over any of them.

This means that at just around the midpoint of his reign at light heavyweight, Jones would have been favored to beat the middleweight champion—Hopkins, whom he'd already beaten—any of the super middleweight titlists, and any of the cruiserweight titlists. (You'll recall that there was a lot of talk about a rematch with Hopkins and also a match with Joe Calzaghe. Jones dropping down in weight to fight either was not implausible.)

Try to name another fighter in your lifetime that would be favored to simultaneously beat beltholders in three divisions outside of his own. And then Jones won an alphabet title at heavyweight. You cannot dispute it. Jones' unique talents put him at a very high level, over a long period of time. That must count for something.

"In order to rate someone with any degree of objectivity, you must ask how he did in his time. The rest is fun and grist for the mill, but it's opinion," said HBO's Larry Merchant. "In his time, Roy Jones was one of the best fighters. The fact that he won titles from middleweight to heavyweight is pretty good. No one had done anything like it for a century or so, but there is a different standard today because there are so many titles. The heavyweight he beat was not regarded as *the* heavyweight champion, but he still beat him. If he had spent his career at middleweight then there would be more certainty of his place."

Merchant's last point is well-taken. Not only because middleweight is where Jones did his best and most inspired work, but because, as Showtime ana-

PHOTO BY TEDDY BLACKBURN

Jones and James Toney (left) pose for a publicity shot prior to their November 1994 bout that established Jones as one of the sport's pound-for-pound finest. Despite the back-alley atmosphere conjured up to hype the pay-per-view fight, Jones made it a one-sided boxing match.

PHOTO BY RICK STEWART/GETTY IMAGES

Jones punishes Vinny Paz with a long left en route to a sixth-round knockout victory in Atlantic City in June 1995. It was typical of Jones' bouts at that time—totally one-sided. It was the second of Jones' five successful defenses of the IBF super middleweight belt.

lyst and respected historian Steve Farhood points out, "Fighters who jump divisions often get cheated because they don't stay put long enough for proper evaluation at a single weight. Jones is going to fare far better in an overall career assessment than at one weight. He was a light heavyweight for about nine years, which is a long time, but he suffered all four of his career losses at 175. While wins over Virgil Hill, Reggie Johnson, and Antonio Tarver are nice, they pale in comparison to the three biggest wins of his career, versus Bernard Hopkins, James Toney, and John Ruiz, none of which came at light heavyweight."

Jones' record of multiple titles and division hopping is, counter intuitively, emblematic in the eyes of many of precisely why he doesn't compare to the greats at, say, light heavyweight, which is where he fought most of his title fights. All the titles and belts, and by association, all the defenses, are reduced in value in a time when the game is watered down to the degree that it is by the multiple so-called champions and superfluous weight classes. All the adornments make a guy like

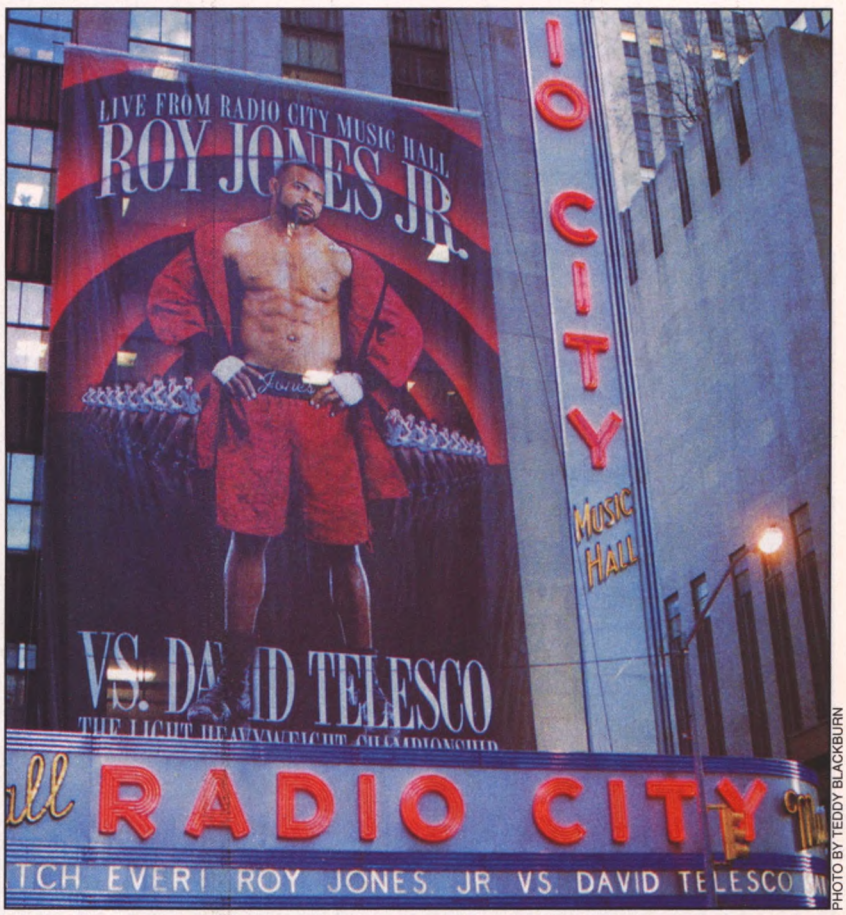


PHOTO BY TEDDY BLACKBURN

Jones owns the distinction of being the only fighter to ever headline a card at New York's legendary Radio City Music Hall. That was in January 2000, when he retained the world light heavyweight championship with a 12-round decision over David Telesco.

Jones look better than he really is when you put him next to the fighters from earlier eras.

Historian and Hall of Fame promoter J Russell Peltz told THE RING he would have trouble placing Jones in the top 10 or 12 among the all-time light heavyweights, ranking him not just below Archie Moore, Harold Johnson, Bob Foster, and Ezzard Charles, but also Maxie Rosenbloom, Joey Maxim, and Eddie Mustafa Muhammad.

"It's hard to compare Roy Jones' win over John Ruiz to, say, Mickey Walker's draw with Jack Sharkey," said Peltz. "Sorry, but I cannot buy it. And don't give me that argument about heavyweights being bigger today. Bigger does not necessarily mean better. Don't forget, Dempsey was 187 when he blitzed the 245-pound Willard and opened boxing's Golden Age."

Farhood places Jones at about the same level as does Peltz. "Jones certainly doesn't crack my all-time top five at light heavyweight, which is Ezzard Charles, Archie Moore, Bob Foster, Gene Tunney, and Tommy Loughran," he said. "Top 10? Maybe, though I wouldn't rank him ahead of Michael Spinks."

There also is the question, as there always has been, of the quality of the opposition Jones faced, particularly at light heavyweight. Jones' 175-pound division is regarded as one of the weakest of the last 100 years. But this may be a case of a different standard being applied to Jones. The light heavyweight division Jones dominated was probably no worse off than was the middleweight class over which Hopkins reigned, and Hopkins is considered by many a top-10 all-time middleweight, and was viewed as such even before his wins over Felix Trinidad and Oscar De La Hoya.

"I've always believed that those who criticize the quality of Jones' opposition were unfair," said Farhood. "With a bad hand, he beat Hopkins, who went on to be number one pound-for-pound. He dominated against Toney, who was, at worst, number two pound-for-pound at the time. And at heavyweight he beat Ruiz for fun, something a handful of top-10 heavyweights have failed to do. Ultimately, and at the end, Jones was somewhat of a disappointment. But his prime was awesome."

But even if you don't penalize Jones for the guys he fought, you could penalize him for those he did not, particularly at super middleweight. Jones could have fought Nigel Benn or Gerald McClellan. He could have faced Steve Collins or Chris Eubank. He chose not to. Eric Lucas, Vinny Pazienza, and Bryant Brannon were easier. Later on Rick Frazier was easier than, say, Michael Nunn, who, like Tarver, was a tall, rangy southpaw.

And, of course, there was Dariusz Michalczewski, whom Jones repeatedly refused to face because doing so would have entailed going to Europe. You could make the argument, as Jones did, that as the champion, he wasn't required to go to a challenger's home country. He didn't think it was a smart move. It was that kind of thinking that turned many off to Jones. If you're a real champion you fight the second-best guy in the division. That's what real champions do.

"Harold Johnson went to Berlin to defend his world title against Gustav Scholz in June 1962, before 40,000 in a Berlin soccer stadium," said Peltz. "Scholz was one of the greatest German fighters ever, maybe the best ever, but certainly no worse than number two behind Schmeling. He had lost something like one or two fights out of 65 or 70 when he challenged Harold. Both the judges and the voting referee were from Europe.

"Harold won a 15-round decision. But would Roy go to Germany to fight Michalczewski? No! Sure, Harold went for the money, which Roy had here. And that makes Roy a great businessman, not a great fighter."

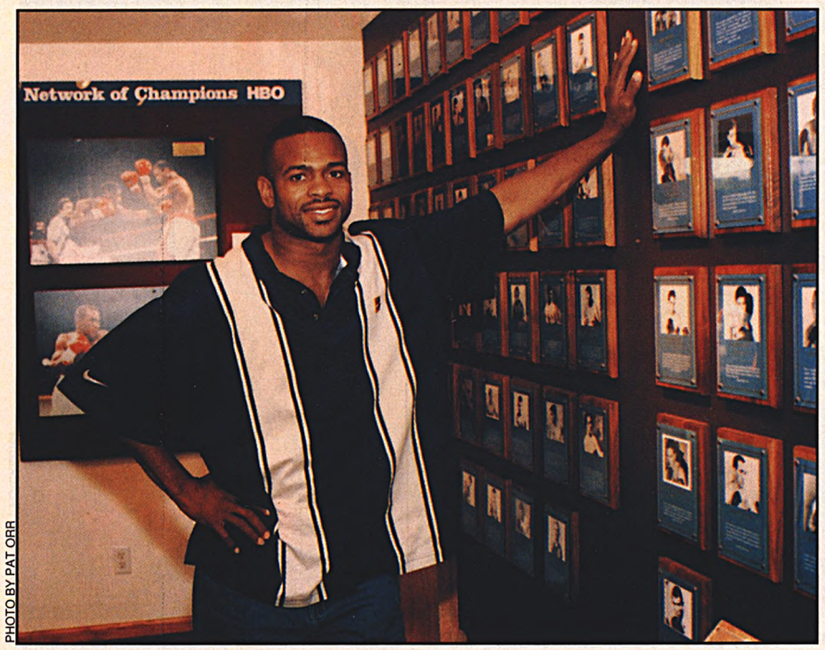


PHOTO BY PAT ORR

A peek into the future: Jones visited the International Boxing Hall of Fame in Canastota, New York, in July 1996, where he will undoubtedly be enshrined five years after his final bout.

SIX

June 15, 1996: Jones plays 15 minutes for his beloved Jacksonville Barracuda of the United States Basketball League just hours before defending the IBF super middleweight title against Eric Lucas. For the record, he scores six points in the game and stops Lucas after the 11th round. No truth to the rumor Lucas rode the bench for the Washington Generals.

March 21, 1997: After falling behind early to Montell Griffin, Jones finally breaks through and floors him in the ninth. He lands a light shot while Griffin is down, and the challenger promptly collapses as though de-boned and is counted out. Jones is disqualified and later tells HBO's Larry Merchant that he's not required to stop punching until the referee pulls him away.

August 7, 1997: Five months after losing the WBC light heavyweight title on a disqualification to slippery Montell Griffin, Jones explodes in the rematch, battering Griffin and stopping him in the first round. It is the one and only career sighting of the notorious "RJ," Jones' ruthless alter ego.

SURREAL ROY JONES MOMENTS

Say what you want about Jones' place in history, his ridiculous talent and over-the-top ego provided fight fans with some positively surreal moments over the last decade. Here are the six we remember most.

PHOTOS BY RAY BAILEY

Jones drills Griffin twice while he's on the floor

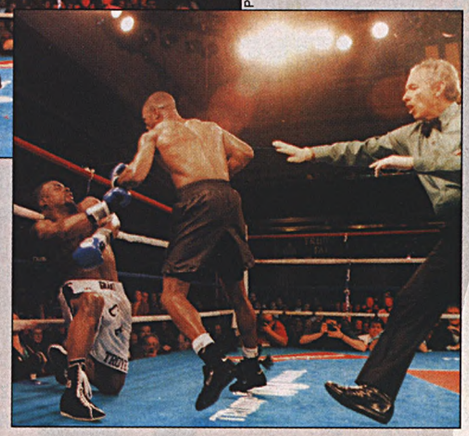


PHOTO BY TOM CASINO

Jones plays basketball prior to besting Lucas

June 5, 1999: While shutting out solid veteran Reggie Johnson to unify the light heavyweight title, Jones breaks off a brilliant one-two in the third that drops Johnson like a bag of rocks. If you saw it, you remember it and know why it's here. It was breathtaking.

February 2, 2002: While showboating against the hapless and utterly terrified Glen Kelly in yet another miserably conceived title-fight mismatch, Jones puts his hands behind his back in the seventh round and slips several of Kelly's meek attempts to land. Then he jumps in with a right hand that cuffs Kelly on the side of the head, dropping him. Look ma, no chin.

February 26, 2002: Jones' rap CD, *Round One,* is released, with an accompanying video no less, for a track called "Ya'll Must've Forgot." It is Jones' answer to an ever-expanding body of critics dismissive of his choice of opponents. Our favorite line from the track: "When I beat Bernard Hopkins, and won the IBF/ The right was hurt, beat him with the left / Y'all musta forgot! ..." Why would anyone want to win the IBF?

—WD

PHOTO BY TOM CASINO

Jones rocks John Ruiz' world with a right hand en route to a 12-round decision and the WBA heavyweight title. Ironically, it was Jones' most celebrated victory and his last outstanding performance.

Peltz isn't alone in his thinking that what Jones possessed in natural talent and business acumen he lacked in the kind of fighting courage we insist our great ones to possess. Particularly at 175, it was clear that Jones was not interested in taking risks in the ring. Much of it was attributed to his attachment to McClellan, who suffered debilitating injuries in his knockout loss to Benn. But what did that matter from the perspective of the fan? Or the media? Be a fighter or don't be a fighter. It appeared on many nights that Jones was content to fight with one foot in the ring and the other one out. And he wanted to get paid well to do it. That didn't win him many fans among the very hardcore.

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

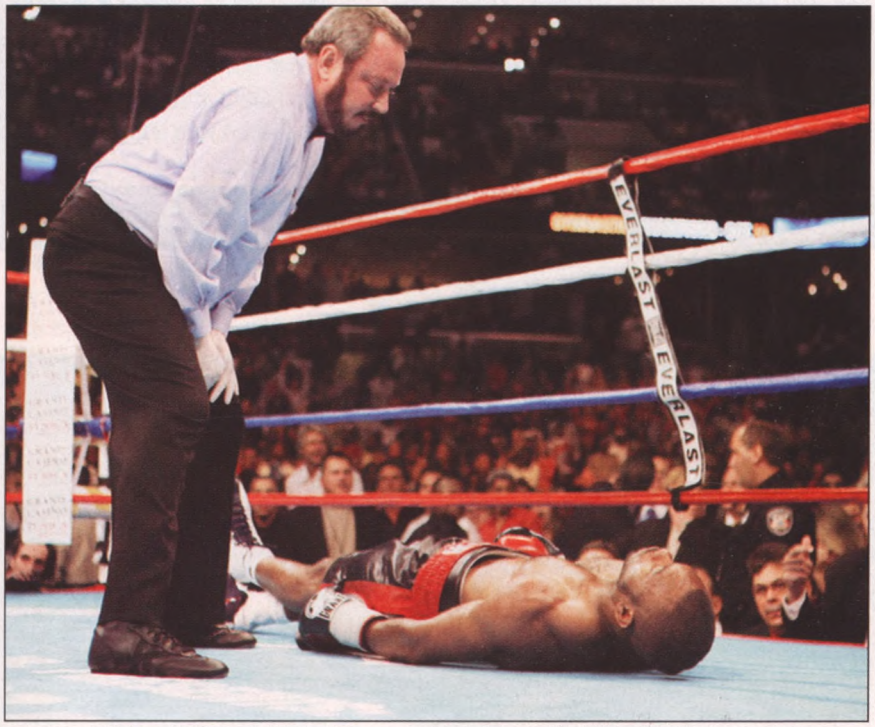
One of a handful of top 175-pounders that Jones didn't fight was Dariusz Michalczewski (left). Part of the problem was that Jones didn't want to fight in Germany, where Michalczewski was a major attraction. Historians, however, point out that many great champions defended their titles abroad.

"The resentment that was built up against Jones came when he moved to light heavyweight and often dominated opponents and was satisfied to coast to victories," Merchant said. "There was a general feeling that he never pushed himself to be as dominant as we expect great champions to be, and he often left fans with a feeling of anticlimax. It was his basically cautious nature that led to a lot of these anticlimactic fights.

"As a middleweight he was so dazzling and so hungry and ambitious to make his reputation that the caution could be overlooked because he was doing things that were breathtaking," Merchant continued. "He created a high standard and that led to expectations, and when he fought bigger guys he became more cautious. That led some people to believe he didn't live up to the standard he created."

It is the height of irony that when Jones finally did display the real heart

Back-to-back knockout defeats at the hands of Antonio Tarver (above) and Glen Johnson (below) shocked Roy's loyal fans and proved that he wasn't Superman after all.



and grit of a prizefighter, it was too late and it did him in. He didn't have to take a rematch against Tarver after having squeaked by him in their first match. If he had retired afterward, who would have blamed him? He'd done everything he'd wanted. But when there was some residual question as to his superiority, he did what we expect courageous fighters to do: He gave Tarver a rematch. He paid for it. Then he paid for it against Johnson too. Those two fights, and the final, limping, mostly half-hearted and rather sad challenge of Tarver in the rubber match told us a little more about Jones than we wanted to know. And it wasn't good.

"Everybody has his or her own criteria for what makes an all-time great," said Farhood. "One of my requisites is ability to overcome adversity. With the arguable exception of Tarver I, where he won the last couple of rounds, during which fight did Jones tough it out? His skills were unparalleled, and as long as he had physical advantages, he dominated. But toward the end, and against Tarver and Johnson, he failed miserably in competing when that wasn't the case. Even Pernell Whitaker, who won for most of his career in similar fashion to Jones, showed something when he came back to stop Diosbelys Hurtado. Jones has no such fight to point to. The first Montell Griffin fight might've provided him with one, but the unfortunate ending ruined his chances."

Merchant agrees. "I've said before that you don't judge people by their late work, but it does impact him to a degree."

Indeed, two straight knockout losses—against guys who aren't known as big punchers—and then a sad, stumbling decision defeat is not the end many of us would have predicted for Jones, even when we know it has to end that way. But it has ended, and we are left with the impression that he was a magnificent physical specimen, brilliantly talented, and gifted well beyond what should be considered fair. Gyms all over the world are full of fighters who won't approach accomplishing one-tenth of what he did. We all should be as successful. And shame on him for not doing more. ■

HERE'S TO THE NEW YEAR ... LET'S DO IT RIGHT!

THE 10 FIGHTS WE'D LIKE TO SEE

By Don Stradley

Choosing the 10 fights we'd like to see in 2006 isn't as easy as it sounds. On average, between 60 and 70 percent of the fights we wished for in past years never happened. And some of the fights we asked for turned out to be duds. In 2002, THE RING called for a rematch between "Bones" Adams and Paulie Ayala. We got what we wanted. Does anyone remember it? Probably not. But we also liked the idea of matching a seemingly washed-up Arturo Gatti with a journeyman named Micky Ward. That one turned out pretty well.

Compiling this list is difficult for many reasons, namely politics and scheduling. A list of fantasy fights might feel incomplete without including Floyd Mayweather-Ricky Hatton, but you won't see that fight here. There are so many obstacles in the way of that one taking place that it's not even worth dreaming about.

The 10 fights we chose have a common theme. Every one of them involves a fighter, in some cases two, at a turning point. He might be a young fighter trying to prove he's for real or an old fighter proving he still belongs. That's why we feel these 10 fights are interesting. That could also be why many of them won't happen. Some fighters just aren't in a hurry to prove anything. But if all goes well, maybe a few of these will happen. And if some of them occur and aren't as good as we'd imagined, maybe there'll be another Ward-Gatti in here to make up the difference. Keep your fingers crossed.

1

Lacy slams Omar Sheika

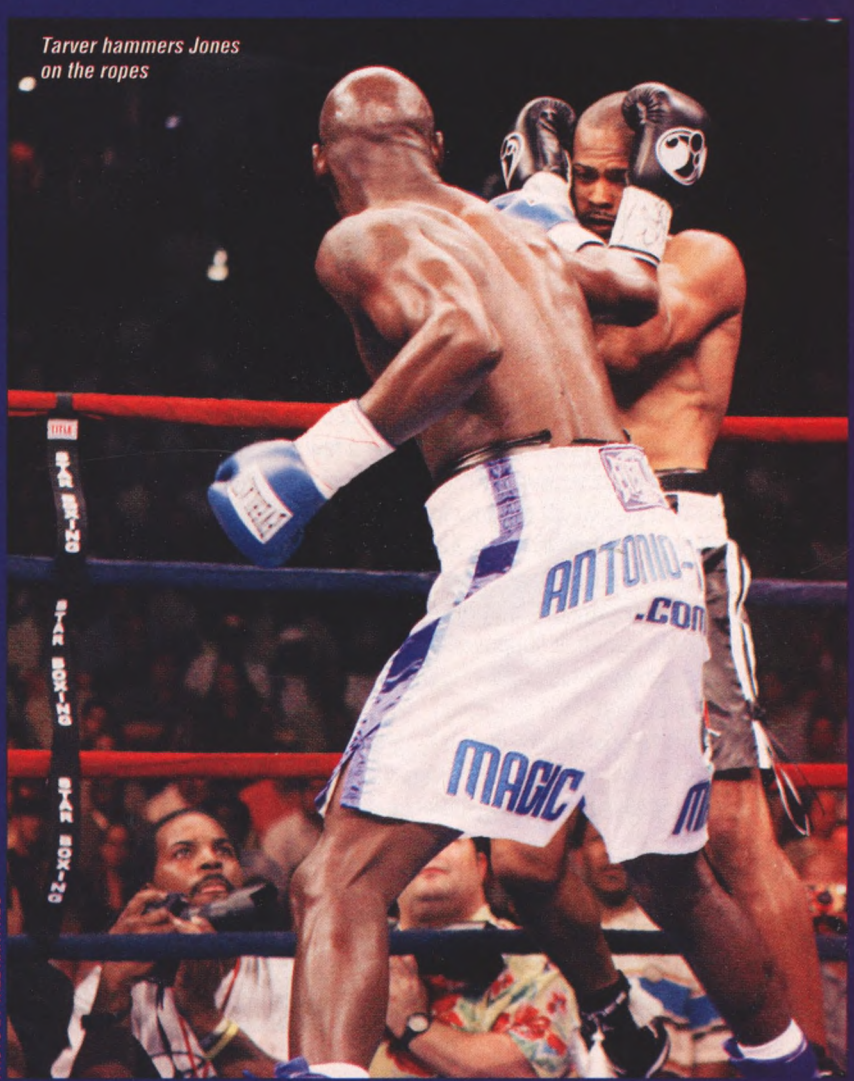
PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

ANTONIO TARVER vs. JEFF LACY

Why We'd Like To See It: After watching him flatten Scott Pemberton like he was swatting a fly, it's obvious that bigger and better things are awaiting Lacy. Since Tarver is the premier man at light heavyweight, and since both are Florida fighters, this sounds like a blockbuster waiting to happen. Forget Joe Calzaghe. Let's see Tarver-Lacy.

Who Would Win And Why: Lacy is so physically strong that it will take a very good boxer to beat him. It will have to be a fighter who can box well enough to keep him at bay, punch hard enough to hold his own in exchanges, and is tough enough to absorb Lacy's best shots. Lacy may not be brilliant in the ring, but at some point in every fight he corners his opponent and seems to say, "I'll hit you and you hit me. Let's go." Can Tarver take it? Tarver can probably outbox Lacy for a while, but the way he feared getting tagged by Roy Jones in October makes us doubt Tarver will trade punches with him. The way his aging legs tired out in the late rounds isn't a good sign, either. Beating a young bull like Lacy would be an amazing coupe for Tarver, but we're not sure he can do it. We pick Lacy by late-round kayo.

Chances Of It Happening: Florida fans would love it. Most everyone else would love it too. Tarver has said that he would do it if Lacy becomes a bigger star, which means he will probably avoid it for a while. Still, there's been enough talk about this one that it's already starting to feel real. Tarver has talked about fighting heavyweights, or maybe taking a role in Sylvester Stallone's next *Rocky* flick. But when he realizes the megabucks payday isn't out there, he may just accept Lacy's challenge later this year.



Tarver hammers Jones on the ropes

PHOTO BY WILL HART HBO

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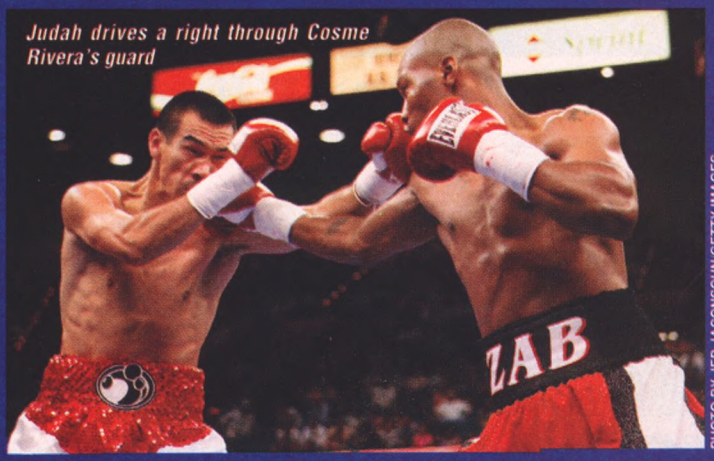


Judah drives a right through Cosme Rivera's guard

PHOTO BY JED JACONSOHN/GETTY IMAGES

ZAB JUDAH VS. ANTONIO MARGARITO

Margarito clobbers Cintron with a left

PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

Why We'd Like To See It: Four years after his devastating loss to Kostya Tszyu, Zab Judah has finally scratched his way back to respectability, winning the welterweight championship and showing a new level of maturity. Enter Margarito, a Mexican hard case with a proven ability to blast through pretenders, as he did in 2005 by stopping young Kermit Cintron. If Judah is legit, Margarito is the truth machine that will let us know for sure. Besides, Margarito is THE RING's number-one contender and has earned a crack at the title.

Who Will Win And Why: Judah would use his speed and southpaw style to dominate the early rounds, but once he feels a few taps on his less-than-sturdy chin, he'll go on the defensive. Margarito is naturally bigger and more durable than Judah. Provided he doesn't get cut the way he did in two fights with Daniel Santos, we think Margarito is good enough to catch Judah and pound out a close decision.

Chances Of It Happening: Take the money you'd spend on a ringside seat and go buy your wife or girlfriend something nice, because this one probably won't happen. One minute Judah is supposedly getting a rematch with Tszyu. Then he's calling out Floyd Mayweather. Judah wants big fights, and wouldn't risk those future paydays against tough-guy Margarito. Sure, there's always the chance that those big fights won't happen and Judah will fight Margarito as a last resort, but it's more likely that Judah will remain in Don King pay-per-view purgatory, and Margarito will spend the year making mandatory defenses of his WBO belt on ESPN.

Karamzin attack Ouma

3

MIGUEL COTTO vs. LUIS COLLAZO

Why We'd Like To See It: Ricardo Torres may have taken Cotto to the limit last September, but Cotto won and established himself as one of the most exciting fighters around. So how about pitting him against Collazo, another all-action slugger? The possible rivalry between the Puerto Rican native (Cotto) and the Puerto Rican by way of New York (Collazo) could create the sort of hoopla that made Hector Camacho—Edwin Rosario a hot ticket at Madison Square Garden in 1986.

Who Will Win And Why: Cotto is a big junior welter, but Collazo has fought many times at junior middle. So even though Cotto is the harder puncher, Collazo has the size and strength to make it interesting. What Cotto has to go along with his punch, however, is a sense of destiny. He gets rattled, but he doesn't fold. We think that will be the difference. If Cotto boxes smartly the way he did against Mohamad Abdulaev, he wins by decision. If he chooses to brawl, he wins that way too.

Chances Of It Happening: It could happen, but don't plan your vacation around it. Since Cotto isn't ready to fight Mayweather, and since the HBO/Showtime/USA/UK nonsense will probably prevent him from fighting junior welter champ Ricky Hatton, it might make good business sense to have the 140-pound Cotto test the welterweight field. Collazo's WBA title would probably be easier to win than Judah's world championship, or Margarito's WBO bauble. On the other hand, Collazo is not well-known. If Collazo continues winning and becomes a name, maybe this one happens in the future. But not now.

Cotto works Torres' body

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Collazo rips Jose Rivera with a left

PHOTO BY ED MULHOLLAND

4

ROMAN KARMAZIN vs. KASSIM OUMA II

PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

Why We'd Like To See It: It wasn't pretty, but Karmazin dominated Ouma in July 2005 by sticking to a basic strategy of throwing right hands against the southpaw. Ouma survived two knockdowns, made a fight of it during the middle rounds, but flattened out near the end as Karmazin went on to win on points. Ouma later clamed he was ill during the fight, and we tend to believe him, especially since he returned to his old form later in the year and kayoed Alfredo Cuevas. A rematch with Karmazin would give Ouma a chance to prove he's the young star we've been rooting for since his wins over J.C. Candelo, Verno Phillips, and Kofi Jantuah. It would also give Karmazin a chance to prove he deserves the IBF belt he won from Ouma. Moreover,

with Karmazin holding down the top spot in THE RING's 154-pound ratings, and Ouma at number two, the vacant world title would be up for grabs.

Who Will Win And Why: Kassim "The Dream" was sluggish last time and allowed Karmazin to dictate the early rounds. For the rematch, he'll have to start fast and work hard for all 12 rounds, which is what he usually does. Even though Karmazin is the sort of rock-steady fighter who will always be trouble for flighty characters like Ouma, a healthy Ouma should win by a close decision.

Chances Of It Happening: Ouma is not a big enough name that he can resume his career as if the loss never happened (as Barrera did after losing to Pacquiao, or Erik Morales did after losing to Zahir Raheem). Ouma needs to redeem himself. Karmazin has even less commercial potential than Ouma, so the biggest payday for him is probably a rematch. We think this one will happen. But Karmazin might fight Daniel Santos first, which could possibly ruin the rematch.

5

JOSE LUIS CASTILLO VS. DIEGO CORRALES III

Castillo rocks Corrales in their rematch

PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

Why We'd Like To See It: Their first fight was one of the best ever. Castillo was on his way to victory, but he didn't count on Corrales' miracle comeback. Corrales dropping his mouthpiece and getting more time to clear his head gave the bout an odd twist. The rematch had another twist, as Castillo showed up 3½ pounds over the 135-pound limit and left us to wonder if he'd done it on purpose to avoid draining himself. He kayoed Corrales in four, setting up the inevitable rubber match. Hopefully, they'll get ample recovery time before their third try and fight at a weight that works for both.

Who Would Win And Why: With all of the controversy surrounding the weigh-in, you'd think Castillo kayoed Corrales by hitting him in the head with a scale. But he didn't. He hit him with a left hook, the same left hook that had been on target all night. A lot of experts thought Corrales would box a little more in the rematch, but Corrales is in love with his own power and chose to stay on top of Castillo. That was his undoing. Unless "Chico" has another miracle in him, the stronger, smarter Castillo should win the rubber match. It will be somewhat like the first bout, only sloppier. The trilogy may turn these two into legends, but will they have anything left when it's over? Castillo by kayo.

Chances Of It Happening: It's nice to have at least one no-brainer on the list. This one will happen. We can't predict what weight it will be at, but we are certain of two things: The winner's star will shine brighter than Steve Albert's teeth, and promoters Bob Arum and Gary Shaw will find something to complain about before, during, and after the bout.

PHOTO BY QUIROZ WARRIOR BOXING

MARCO ANTONIO BARRERA vs. MANNY PACQUIAO II

Why We'd Like To See It: Barrera needs to prove their first fight was a fluke. Pacquiao needs to prove their first fight was *not* a fluke. It's as simple as that. Besides, if there's a chance to put two future Hall of Famers into the ring, you just do it.

Who Would Win And Why: After rough fights with Erik Morales and Juan Manual Marquez, Pacquiao would look at Barrera like a comfortable old couch and promptly beat the stuffing out of him. If the first bout had been closer, we'd give Barrera a chance in the sequel, but Pacquiao didn't just beat him last time, he ran him over like a truck. Barrera has shown that he can still beat the likes of Mzonke Fana and Robbie Peden, but those guys aren't Pacquiao. Barrera will avoid getting kayoed this time, but Pac-Man wins the rematch by decision.

Chances Of It Happening: Pacquiao has to get by Erik Morales first, and that's not a sure thing. We also get the feeling Barrera would rather fight Morales a few more times instead of tangling with Pacquiao again. Boxing is funny that way: Pacquiao might have Barrera's number. Morales might have Pacquiao's number. And Barrera seems to have Morales' number. That's why we love this stuff. But if Pacquiao somehow beats Morales in their rematch, that might force Barrera-Pacquiao II. Since Golden Boy Promotions wants to put Barrera on pay-per-view every time he farts, they may as well give us our money's worth by matching him with Pacquiao.

Pacquiao dominates Barrera

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

7

JORGE ARCE vs. VIC DARCHINYAN

Darchinyan takes IBF belt from Pacheco

Why We'd Like To See It: After his last fight, an easy two-round kayo of Hussein Hussein, Arce started calling out Rosendo Alvarez. Beating a relatively big name like Alvarez would mean a lot to Arce, but instead of watching him beat a 35-year-old fighter who hasn't looked good in a while, we'd rather see him take on the undefeated Darchinyan. Along with featuring two of the hardest punching flyweights in the world, this fight would be intriguing for another reason: Darchinyan is trained by Jeff Fenech, who trained Hussein in both of his losing efforts to Arce. Fenech would relish sending the stronger Darchinyan in to face Arce.

Who Would Win And Why: Darchinyan is a stiff-punching southpaw, and one of the few flyweights who can get away with calling himself "The Raging Bull." His kayo of Irene Pacheco for the IBF strap made believers out of us, but Arce has more experience and is accustomed to being in big fights. We think Arce will take some lumps, but ultimately prevail by hard-fought decision. Fenech will go back to Australia 0-3 against "Travieso."

Chances Of It Happening: Arce is a star in Mexico. He also wants to be a star in America, so he's more likely to fight someone who already has a name

Arce hooks Hussein

PHOTO BY WILL HART HBO

in the U.S. like Brian Viloria. As for Darchinyan, he has only fought outside of Australia one time. We'd like to see this one, but we probably won't.

9

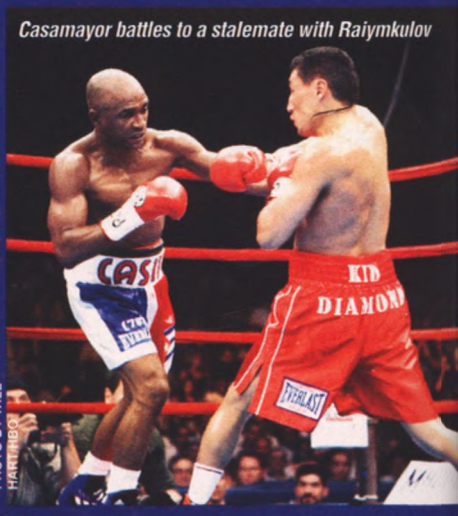

Casamayor battles to a stalemate with Raiymkulov

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

8

LAILA ALI vs. ANN WOLFE

Can Wolfe (inset) do better against Ali than kayo victim Erin Toughill?

PHOTO BY ED MUHOLLAND

Why We'd Like To See It: Women's boxing needs a marquee fight, and this seems to be the only one on the horizon. It's an easy one to sell too: The glamour girl with the famous name versus the girl who grew up in poverty. The cosmetics model versus the woman built like Mike Weaver. You get the idea. Styles make fights, but personalities sell fights. There are so few good female fighters that Wolfe is planning to fight a male opponent just to get some publicity. If it's anything like the last mixed-gender boxing match, the 1999 farce involving Margaret MacGregor and the hapless Loi Chow, it's publicity that won't help Wolfe's career or boxing in general. We don't need Wolfe versus some handpicked dude. But Ali-Wolfe sounds good.

Who Would Win And Why: Wolfe has a puncher's chance, but that's all she has. Ali is taller, quicker on her feet, and she's become pretty handy in the ring. Wolfe is slow, and Ali would land a lot of punches on her way to winning a decision.

Chances Of It Happening: This one could happen in 2006, if only because there's nothing else out there for Ali. Her new promotional company hasn't done much for her lately in terms of getting her name out there. If Ali wants those endorsements to keep coming her way, she has to keep fighting.

JUAN DIAZ VS. JOEL CASAMAYOR

Diaz stabs Sim with a jab

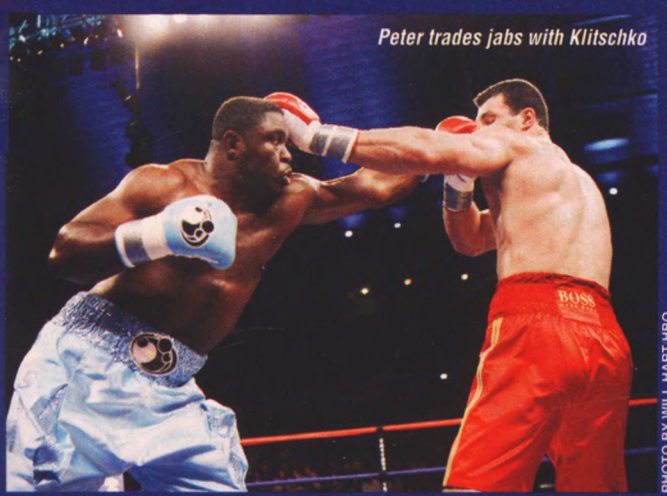
PHOTO BY WILL HART HBO

Why We'd Like To See It: Diaz received a lot of ink in 2004, but not so much in 2005. One way for him to get back in the limelight would be to defend his WBA title against a seasoned, high-profile former titlist like Casamayor. A win would be an incredible boost for young Diaz. Casamayor kept his career alive with a draw against Kid Diamond last summer and needs something big to put him back in the upper echelon. Beating a young hotshot like Diaz would do it.

Who Would Win And Why: We see the fight going this way: Diaz will try to establish his usual, whirlwind pace by throwing a ton of jabs, and hooking to the body. Casamayor will try to upset Diaz' momentum with headbutts and other rough tactics. Both guys are going to spill some blood, and Casamayor will have a point or two deducted for fouling. In the end, Diaz rallies to pass his toughest test and wins by decision.

Chances Of It Happening: Casamayor would probably fight Diaz for a nickel, and Diaz would never turn down a fight. Still, they're not likely to meet. Main Events wants to play it safe and match Diaz against middle-of-the-road fighters so he can defend his alphabet title and build up his following in Texas and Mexico. He's probably ready for tougher opponents, but Main Events will wait a while.

10



Peter trades jabs with Klitschko

PHOTO BY WILL HART HBO

LAMON BREWSTER VS. SAM PETER

Why We'd Like To See It: Just put these two hard-punching behemoths in the ring and stand back. Something amazing is bound to happen. Brewster is slowly gaining in popularity—he comes to fight, he's a nice guy, and his fights are almost always entertaining. Peter is coming off a loss to Wladimir Klitschko, but he looked good in defeat and didn't disgrace himself. While it's not exactly George Foreman vs. Ron Lyle, Peter and Brewster could give us a heavyweight war to remember.

Who Would Win And Why: As much as we appreciate Brewster's recent efforts, he's not a good enough boxer to avoid Peter's bombs. He's not the type to use the ring and tie Peter up, as Wlad Klitschko did. He'll be on the Nigerian's doorstep all night, trying to land his big left hook. Since Peter seems more durable, we think Brewster will fall after five or six violent rounds.

Chances Of It Happening: 50/50. The heavyweight division needs fights like this one, but chances are Wladimir Klitschko may get to Brewster first. If Klitschko were to avenge his 2004 loss to Brewster, we'll probably see another Peter-Klitschko bout, which would be okay. But if Brewster stops Klitschko again, maybe we'll see Peter-Brewster later in the year, especially if Peter can win a tune-up before then just to keep his name in lights. Let's hope so. ■

Don Stradley is a freelance writer from Massachusetts and a regular contributor to this magazine.

Brewster was too much for Luan Krasniqi

PHOTO BY ROLAND MAGUNIA AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Marco Antonio Barrera

"I Love My Job"

For much of his career, Marco Antonio Barrera was just one of many Mexican boxers trying to fight his way out of the gigantic shadow cast by iconic countryman Julio Cesar Chavez. And even though he was sometimes cast as the "new" or the "next" Chavez, Barrera's assent suffered several setbacks, especially his consecutive losses to Junior Jones. But eventually, Barrera carved out his own special place among the hierarchy of Mexican ring heroes, and as we enter 2006, he finds himself, with all due respect to arch-rival Erik Morales, at the very top of his country's fistic food chain.

But despite victories over some of the finest fighters of his era—Kennedy McKinney, Johnny Tapia, Naseem Hamed, Paulie Ayala, Morales—and a virtual lock on an eventual induction to the International Boxing Hall of Fame, Barrera is still ambitious, still eager to add additional scalps to his collection. He has won alphabet titles in three different weight classes and also held THE RING's featherweight championship. Now, as he approaches his 32nd birthday, Barrera is preparing to launch an invasion of the lightweight division, and is scheduled to challenge WBC 135-pound titleholder Jesus Chavez on March 25.

THE RING has published many articles about Barrera during his 61-4 (42) career, but his voice had always been filtered through the mouth of an interpreter. Now, thanks to Brent Matteo Alderson, THE RING's new bilingual correspondent who recently interviewed Erik Morales for our sister magazine KO, we have the pleasure of presenting the first extensive interview with Barrera in an English-language publication—in his own uncensored words.

On a cloudy Sunday afternoon in late-October, Alderson picked up Barrera, his brother, Jorge, and his advisor, Robert Diaz, at their downtown Los Angeles hotel and took them to a local Mexican restaurant, where they engaged in hours of discussion. During the course of the interview, the innate differences between Barrera and Morales were glaringly apparent. Alderson reports:

"While Morales exudes a kind of macho bravado in regards to his pugilistic talent, Barrera has an Alexis Arguello-type demeanor and almost comes across as being too modest. Moreover, unlike Morales, Barrera wasn't vindictive toward any of his opponents. Another difference between the two fighters is that Barrera is a genuine boxing aficionado. When we were chatting about a mythical dream match between Julio Cesar Chavez and Salvador Sanchez, he became very animated and was eager to share his knowledge about the careers of both Mexican greats. Conversely, when asked about Sanchez, Erik wasn't even aware of the fact that he had beaten Azumah Nelson. Still, after witnessing the stark contrast between these two men, it was obvious that they share one common trait: They are both enormously proud Mexicans warriors."

The Ring: Generally, fighters come from humble, impoverished backgrounds, but you came from a middleclass background. How did you get into boxing?

Marco Antonio Barrera: I have an uncle, Arturo Luis Miguel Lucas, and he trained with Rudy Perez. My brother and I went with him to the gym and we liked it, but not just the boxing part. We liked being there and messing around. We were active kids with a lot of energy, and after a while we liked the sport more and more, and today I still love it. I love my job.

The Ring: What did your parents say when you, at the age of 15, informed them you wanted to box professionally?

MAB: They supported my decision. They signed a special type of permission slip so I could get authorization from the boxing commission. Actually, we falsified my age and said I was 17, when I was only 15. Everything turned out well and to this day my parents support me. They've always given me a lot of support.

The Ring: When did you realize that you had the talent to be a professional champion?

MAB: Actually, my brother was better as an amateur. He won a lot of titles, the Golden Gloves and some other big tournaments, so people really didn't pay any attention to me. I was always in the background, plus I was always dedicated to my studies. It really wasn't until I turned professional that I realized that I had talent, because for some reason my

PHOTO BY JAN SANDERS

style was better suited for the professional ranks.

The Ring: You have two children, a girl and a boy. Would you let your son fight professionally? After all, Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. is making a lot of money fighting easy opponents.

MAB: *(laughs)* I think it's too difficult. It's a tough sport, and I wouldn't want him to do it. My son says he wants to be a pilot, so instead of giving him teddy bears, I give him airplanes. He sleeps with them because he says that when he's big he's going to fly them. So I'm getting everything ready so he can study and prepare himself for that type of career. I tell my wife, having one crazy boxer in the family is enough. We don't need another.

PHOTO BY JAN SANDERS

Barrera and his son, Marco Antonio Jr., have some fun during a photo shoot. Barrera is thankful that his offspring isn't interested in becoming a fighter, but worries about his family becoming a victim of the rash of kidnappings currently taking place in Mexico City.

The Ring: Do you still live in Mexico City?

MAB: No, we live a little bit outside of Mexico City in Jalisco, but my family still lives in the Federal District.

The Ring: So you consider yourself a Chilango, a person from Mexico City?

MAB: Yes, of course, 100 percent.

The Ring: There a lot of kidnappings in Mexico. Do you ever fear that your family could be at risk?

MAB: It scares me a lot. Mexico City is a little more violent than other parts of Mexico. And that's why I moved my family to Jalisco, where we live comfortably. However, the danger exists because people think boxers make a lot of money. But the reality is that there isn't as much money as people think. I'm serious, the third Morales fight for me was for free; the Mexican government

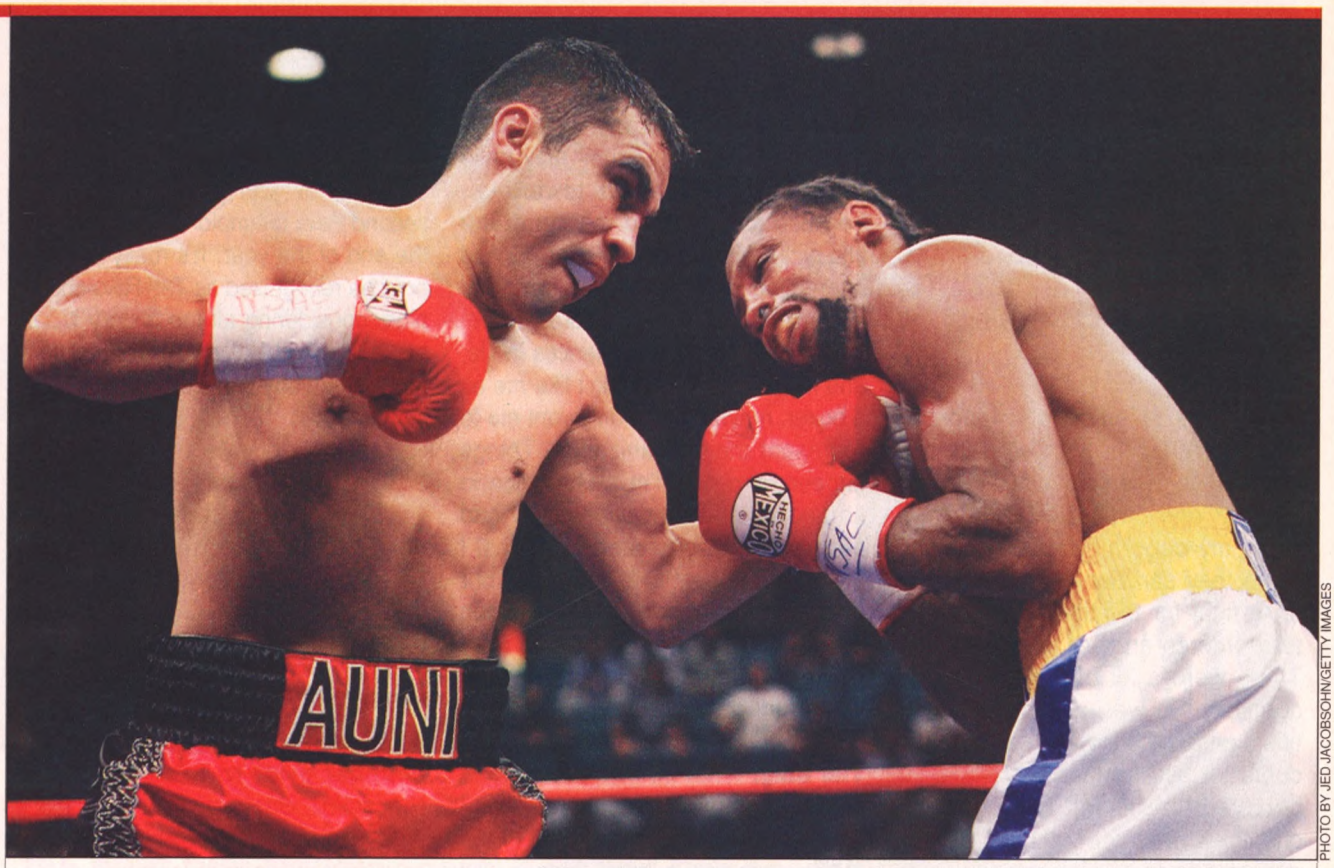


PHOTO BY JED JACOBSOHN/GETTY IMAGES

Despite holding an alphabet belt at 130 pounds and claiming he'd rather fight at 126, Barrera's next bout will be at 135 pounds. He's scheduled to challenge WBC lightweight beltholder Jesus Chavez, pictured landing a left hook in his ill-fated September 2005 fight with Leavander Johnson.

took the entire check (for taxes).

The Ring: You spend a lot of time in the States. Do you have property here?

MAB: I come here a lot, but I was never inclined to buy property. Maybe it's because I'm not accustomed to the lifestyle here, to the pace of life. Everything is so different here.

The Ring: You're fighting at 130 pounds right now. What's your highest walking-around weight?

MAB: Probably 138 pounds. I think I'm 134 right now, but I'm always taking care of myself. I always exercise and run regularly. I'm actually small to be fighting at 130 pounds.

The Ring: Do you diet when you're not training?

MAB: I don't follow a diet. I eat whatever I want. I eat everything. I don't have any problems making 130 pounds. In fact, the day before the weigh-in for the Robbie Peden fight, we were eating hamburgers in the room, and Raul Jaimes from Golden Boy was there and was surprised. Raul commented that he'd never seen that before *(laughs)*. So I guess I have to eat to get up to 130 pounds.

The Ring: You're moving up to 135 to fight Jesus Chavez. Do you want to move up to lightweight permanently?

MAB: Who knows? I think it would be difficult due to the weight, but not impossible. We're not sure right now.

The Ring: It would be a challenge to move up, but it's not like you would be fighting the best fighter in the weight class. Chavez is an alphabet titleholder; Diego Corrales is still the true lightweight champion.

MAB: Yeah, everybody has their time. Jose Luis Castillo had his time. He was one of the greats at that weight, and we'll have to wait and see if he's still going to fight at lightweight. But Jesus Chavez has come into his own as a fighter. It's his time. He's won another world title and without a doubt he's one of the best fighters at the weight. Winning a title in a different division isn't easy, so you have to give Chavez his due. You have to respect him.

The Ring: What do you think about the different alphabet organizations?

MAB: I think it's good that there are four. They give a lot of opportunities to fighters. Even though some of them are older and more established, I view them all in the same light. I think they all have the same type of credibility. The thing is that the fighter pays a percentage to the organizations so that they can keep the organizations going. I feel that they shouldn't accept money from the fighters.

The Ring: You've always had a lot of influence with the WBO. After you officially lost to Morales in the first fight, they continued to recognize you as champion. Can you comment on your relationship with the WBO?

MAB: I have a friendship with WBO President Francisco Valcarcel. I'm very grateful to him and in the not too distant future I would like to get the WBO title because I'm part of the family over there. I'm part of the World Boxing Organization. I don't want to forget about them and would like to win that title for a fourth time. There

aren't any words that can convey the gratefulness that I feel toward Francisco Valcarcel and the WBO.

The Ring: You're from Mexico City and the WBC is also based there, but this is the first time in your career that you've been a WBC titleholder. How come you've worked with the WBO all those years when the WBC was right there in your own backyard?

MAB: I was frozen out of an opportunity to fight for the WBC title for two years. I waited two years as the number one-challenger, and then when my opportunity was going to come they sanctioned another fighter to fight for the title. A year later, they ordered another title eliminator. There were a lot of things, a lot of conflicts. So we just left the WBC title alone and the WBO opened their doors for us at super bantamweight because they didn't want another champ at bantamweight. And I was delighted to receive an opportunity to fight for their title.

The Ring: Have you had any problems with WBC President Jose Sulaiman?

MAB: I don't have any ill feelings toward him at all, but they may have had some bad feelings toward us, because they blocked me out of the title picture for so long. Maybe he had something against my ex-promoters (Forum Boxing). I'm not sure. Sometimes there are inconveniences in life, and maybe the WBC didn't like me as a boxer, maybe they didn't want me to represent their organization. Things happen, and now I'm a champion in an uncomfortable position. They had other plans; they never thought that I was going to beat Erik Morales in our third fight. For them, I'm a champion in an uncomfortable position. They didn't even invite me to their convention. They just happened to forget to recognize one their champions.

The Ring: What do you think about THE RING magazine's championship policy?

MAB: I think it's a good thing. I was very happy with THE RING belt when they gave it to me after the second fight with Morales. I was really pleased to have received the belt. Actually, we were thinking and feel that we've beaten some of the best fighters at 130 pounds and hope to receive a second RING championship belt before the end of the year. It's really an honor to be recognized as THE RING champion, considering all the history it has behind it. And I also like the fact that there aren't any sanctioning fees.

The Ring: Well, THE RING 's championship policy says that to fill a vacancy, the number-one contender at the weight has to beat either the number-two or, depending on circumstances, the number-three contender in order to earn THE RING championship. Unfortunately, you were not ranked at 130 pounds before the third fight with Morales because you hadn't fought as 130-pounder prior to that match. ***(At this point, Barrera's advisor, Robert Diaz, and his brother, Jorge Barrera, joined the discussion.)***

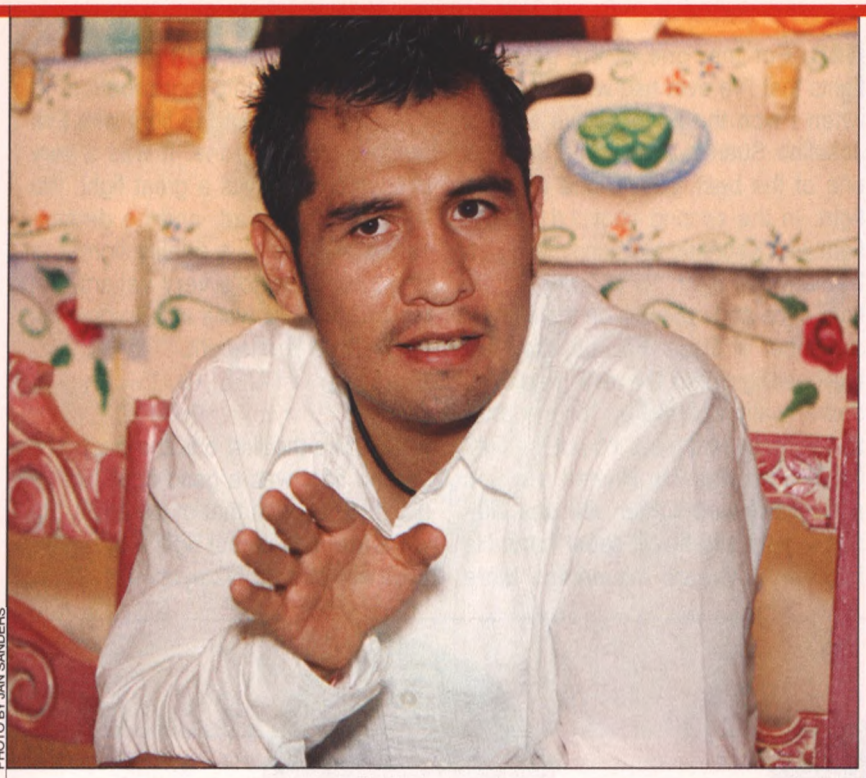
Robert Diaz: We offered Erik a fourth fight this past September in place of fighting Peden. We offered it to him since they also wanted to fight on that date, and they rejected the fight. Marco and Oscar De La Hoya were more than willing to make the Morales fight on that date because there was some controversy about to whom they were going to give the date to. So Marcos said, "Let's have a fourth fight then; I'm ready." But they didn't want it.

The Ring: Was there a problem with the division of the purses or on the division of promotional duties?

Robert Diaz: They didn't even want to talk about making

PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

Following his second fight with Erik Morales, Barrera receives THE RING featherweight championship belt from Editor-in-Chief Nigel Collins. Barrera says he would like to win THE RING'S 130-pound belt next.



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"I was frozen out of an opportunity to fight for the WBC title for two years. I waited two years as the number-one challenger, and then when my opportunity was going to come they sanctioned another fighter to fight for the title. A year later, they ordered another title eliminator. There were a lot of things, a lot of conflicts. So we just left the WBC title alone."

the fight. They flat out rejected it. We didn't even have a chance to go into negotiations. There was no interest on their part. So we're not going to just sit around and wait for Erik Morales. Barrera has so many options. There are so many directions that he can go. Chavez, Jorge Barrios, there's a lot of options out there.

The Ring: What do you think about the recent ring tragedies?

MAB: All sports are dangerous. We, as athletes, are exposed to danger. A bullfighter, a racecar driver, a motorcycle rider, even soccer players have died out on the field. We're all taking risks. However, in boxing it's different because so many people see the tragedies. But that's the risk that we take and we know that as fighters we have to train and prepare accordingly in order to limit the risk.

The Ring: Tell us about the brain surgery that you had?

MAB: The surgery was in '97. It was at the end of July. I think it was July 31. I had a genetic malformation. I had some visits with Dr. Ignacio Madrazo, who at the time was working with Muhammad Ali, treating him for Parkinsons. They performed it on this side *(points to the left side of his head)*. They put in a plate as well as screws. Since it was a very complicated surgery, I thought my boxing career was over. But then the doctor asked me if I was ready for my next fight.

The Ring: So it wasn't something

that happened because you're a boxer.

MAB: No, the problem wasn't from boxing or from a punch or from training. In one of the medical check-ups that I regularly undergo, they noticed a malformation of a little vein and informed me that I could just take medicine for it, but that it would be for the duration of my entire life. Surgery was the other option, so I chose it. They told me that they could take the plate out now if I wanted them to, but it's part of me now.

The Ring: Let's talk about some of your fights. Which have been the most important to you personally?

MAB: For me, one of the greatest fights that I've ever had was in Mexico when I won the national title against Josefino Suarez. In his time, he was one of the best, but no one saw the fight. In the second spot, I'd put the fight with Kennedy McKinney. It was a tremendous fight; he put me on the floor once and I put him on the canvas a number of times. For me, that was the best fight that I've ever had. The doors really opened up for me after that fight. In third place I'd put the fight with Prince Naseem Hamed. He was a very awkward fighter. He was difficult to fight and he hit super hard. He had very awkward movement. More than anything, the fight with Hamed was Marco Antonio's graduation. In fourth place, I'd put the fight with Erik Morales, the first one. It was a very intense fight. It was a great fight. We went head-to-head, and he demonstrated that he is a quality fighter, a great fighter who's very valiant. I'm thankful that we were able to give the fans such a terrific fight.

The Ring: Which of the three fights with Morales was your best?

MAB: I like the first one the best. The second fight was a good fight, but he didn't hit me with that many shots. He got a few cuts in that fight, one on his nose and two on his eyebrows. Then,

PHOTO BY MICHAEL GRECCO/HBO

The rivalry between Barrera and Morales has been one of the very best of recent years. Although Barrera holds a 2-1 edge after three bouts, all of them were close and fans would love to see them tangle a fourth time. But according to Barrera, Morales turned down an opportunity for a fourth fight, so he fought Robbie Peden instead.

PHOTO BY JAN SANDERS

"They performed [the operation] on this side. They put in a plate as well as screws. Since it was a very complicated surgery, I thought my boxing career was over. But then the doctor asked me if I was ready for my next fight."

in the third fight, we put on another great fight. In that fight, it was a personal pride thing between us. I came out of the fight without any marks, without getting beat up, and he came out of it a little beat up. The thing with the third fight was that I moved up, while he was the naturally bigger fighter. I'm not a natural 130-pounder, and we shattered the idea that a good smaller fighter couldn't move up and beat a good naturally bigger fighter. We demonstrated that everybody was wrong and that you just have to beat the man in front of you.

The Ring: Morales said that after the second fight that you knew you had lost and that you didn't want to go out in public because you were embarrassed.

MAB: I was never embarrassed. Boxing is a manly sport. I've never had anything to be embarrassed about. In the second fight, they tried to trick us. They tried to cheat and tried to pass off Winning gloves as Reyes. But prior to the fight, my brother took a razor and opened up the gloves. We realized at that moment that they weren't trying to do things on the level and that they felt insecure about the fight, and that now it wasn't sport to them and that they wanted to win in another way. The gloves were correctly changed and I boxed him. I beat him; he didn't even hit me once.

Robert Diaz: By contract, they were supposed to use Reyes gloves. They brought in the gloves. The gloves came from their side, but the gloves were not Reyes. On the outside everything was Reyes, but in the inside they were Winning fabricated gloves that just had the Reyes logo. It was Marco's brother, Jorge, who tried them on and said, "These are not Reyes

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gloves." He was a professional fighter himself. He opened them up and saw that they were Winning gloves, which are different on the inside.

Jorge Barrera: We opened up the glove in front of the commission and demonstrated that they weren't doing things on the level.

The Ring: Morales said he feels that he's the draw and that he has the bigger name. How do you guys feel about that?

Robert Diaz: The public talks. He has a lot fans, he's a great fighter, he's a warrior, but Marco also has his fans, and when Marco fights with Erik, the crowd is divided. Erik's a great champion. He's demonstrated it.

The Ring: Do you feel like the rivalry between your two regions of Mexico has added another dimension to the rivalry with Morales?

MAB: It's started to take that shape, but I don't think so, even though people have made it out to be that way. Really, we're both Mexican. And I don't really view our rivalry as a regional thing, because our sport is something that everyone appreciates. Some people like how he boxes and some people like how I box. You know there was a time when I used to spend a lot of time in Tijuana. I used to spend the weekends down there all the time. I used to go dancing and everything, and I have some really close friends down there. So I don't understand that aspect of the rivalry.

The Ring: Morales said you're not a great fighter and that the situations surrounding the fights with you have made them tough.

MAB: All fights are difficult. In fights of that magnitude there shouldn't be any excuses. I respect what Morales says, but I like to demonstrate things with action, not words.

The Ring: Morales said that you were lying about rooting for him in his fight with Manny Pacquiao, but I also heard that you bet on him to win that fight.

MAB: We don't have a friendship, but I respect him as an excellent boxer, as a warrior. But as a person, he's a little bit closed-minded. I don't know, maybe he's antisocial, maybe he has an inferiority complex. Maybe he's insecure. But as a fighter I respect him, so before Erik's fight with Pacquiao, I asked Robert who he thought was going to win, and he said Pacquiao. He told me he was going to put some money on Pacquiao in Vegas. I told him, "Don't worry about betting on the fight; I'll take the bet. I'll back Morales

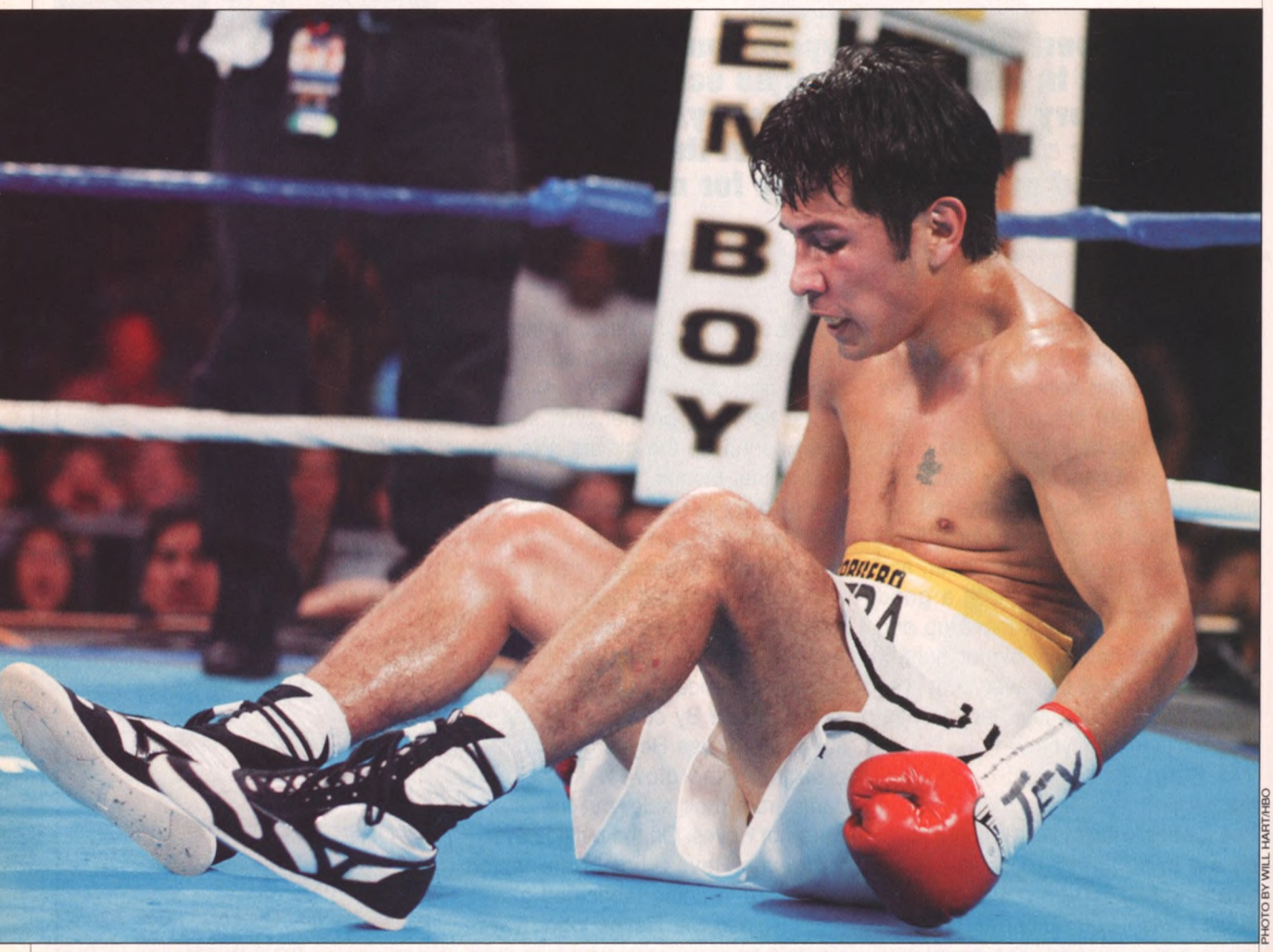

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Barrera is floored during his 11th-round TKO loss to Manny Pacquiao in November 2003. It was the most emphatic defeat of Barrera's career, but he promises to turn the tables if he gets another crack at the fierce Filipino slugger.

PHOTO BY JAN SANDERS

"Starting with the fight with [Jesus] Salud, we concentrated on speed, on hitting without getting hit. And it's worked well even though we haven't always done that, because sometimes you have to use a certain style to beat certain fighters. So on occasions, I've reverted to my old style."

for the $2,000." And I won! *(laughs)*

The Ring: Have you ever disliked an opponent?

MAB: Not one. I have a good relationship with all my rivals. Johnny Tapia always comes to my fights and says, "Brother, where have you been?" I also have a good relationship with Ayala. I am friends with most of my rivals. Unfortunately, with Morales I haven't been able to spark a friendship. I tried to extend my hand to him after the third fight, but he lives in his own little world.

The Ring: What about Naseem Hamed? How do you feel about him?

MAB: As a person he's super nice. He's a good friend. Before and after the fight we developed a friendship. We fought each other as friends, but we both had jobs to do. He's an excellent person. I'm very fond of him. He was a good fighter and had beaten all the different champs at that weight. People have to realize that it's not easy to become a world champ; you have to be a good fighter to become a champion. What happened to the Prince was that he wasn't able to internalize the loss; he wasn't prepared to handle the loss mentally. He was so used to winning.

The Ring: Who hit harder, Hamed or Pacquiao?

MAB: They both hit real hard, but I'd have to say, punch-for-punch, Hamed hit a little bit harder. I don't want to take credit away from Pacquiao; he beat me fair and square. I'd like to say, "Damn, they robbed me," that I'm really undefeated, but I don't do that. You know the losses are on my record, and maybe I had a bad night or

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the other fighter was the better man that night, but I take them as losses.

The Ring: What happened in that fight?

MAB: I don't want to discredit his win over me, but there was a lot of stuff going on, a lot of distractions. My ex-promoters filed a lawsuit against me. I was training in Big Bear and there were fires. The thing with my operation came out, and they sent me to Houston for tests. There were so many distractions, way too many, and in this sport you have to be 100 percent. You need to be completely focused in order to perform well. My camp going in knew that I wasn't 100 percent. He hit me more than I should have been hit because I didn't train accordingly. Again, I don't want to take credit away from Pacquiao. He beat me that night because he was the better fighter that night. If we fight each other in the near future, he's going to see a different fighter, a different Marco Antonio Barrera.

The Ring: In your first fight working with Golden Boy Promotions, you lost to Pacquiao. What did De La Hoya say after the fight?

MAB: He didn't worry about it at all. After the fight, I told him I had let him down. In all the contracts there's a clause specifying that after the first loss the contract is void, but Oscar told me, "Don't even worry about it; go home and rest." He knew about all the problems and distractions, and he never lost faith and continued to support me.

The Ring: Let's go back a bit farther and talk about your first two losses, the pair of fights with Junior Jones? Do you think you won the second fight?

MAB: If I thought that I didn't lose, I would say that they robbed me. But he won the first fight handily. The second fight was close; some people thought he won and some people thought I won. Still, I took them as losses and moved forward with my career.

The Ring: It seemed as if between the fights with Junior Jones and your fight with Jesus Salud that you really came into your own as a boxer, that your defense improved tremendously and that you really evolved into a well-rounded more versatile craftsman. Did you consciously make that change?

MAB: Yes, I wanted to learn how to box, but it was difficult and I still haven't learned it as well as I would like. Starting with the fight with Salud, we concentrated on speed, on hitting without getting hit. And it's worked well even though we haven't always done that because sometimes you have to use a certain style to beat certain fighters. So on occasions, I've reverted to my old style. Whenever I can, I come into a fight trying to get hit the least amount possible. I'm 31 years old now, I'm not 20 anymore, and getting hit with shots doesn't do me any good.

The Ring: Did you also change your fighting style so you would be able to deal with Hamed's power?

MAB: Not just to have a solid defense against him, but also to have a variety of resources to bring into the fight. Just trading shots isn't going to work with a fighter of the Prince's caliber, so I

PHOTO BY JED JACOBSOHN/GETTY IMAGES

Barrera joins fellow Golden Boy Promotions executives Shane Mosley (left) and Oscar De La Hoya in the ring prior to the start of the Jermain Taylor-Bernard Hopkins middleweight championship fight in July 2005. When he retires from the ring, Barrera intends to help De La Hoya discover new talent in Mexico.

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A young Barrera (far left) poses with, from left to right, Louie Espinoza, Jorge Paez, Daniel Jimenez, Genaro Hernandez, Alejandro Gonzalez, and Humberto "Chiquita" Gonzalez, all of who, except Puerto Rican Jimenez, are either Mexican or Mexican-American. When asked where he thinks he ranks among great Mexican fighters, Barrera was extremely modest.

learned how to move better, learned footwork, learned how to use my speed. So I'm grateful that I was able to learn how to box. Even though I'm not as good at it as I would like to be, it's still working out well for me. I'm a more versatile fighter now.

The Ring: How much longer do you want to fight?

MAB: I give 100 percent in training. I'm training harder now than when I was younger, training more responsibly. I've calculated that I'll fight until I'm 36. No more than seven more fights. That's the idea that I have. I want to retire healthy, physically and mentally.

The Ring: In what capacity are you working for Golden Boy Promotions? Are you working with them in the business side of the sport or just concentrating on fighting?

MAB: Right now I'm just fighting, but I'm going to take over the reigns of Golden Boy Promotions Mexico, and along with Oscar De La Hoya, the president of Golden Boy Promotions, we're going to look for talent, do some functions down in Mexico. I can't give a lot of attention to it right now because I'm dedicated to my boxing career. But when I'm finally retired, I'm going to dedicate more time to finding and developing new talent.

The Ring: Shane Mosley, Bernard Hopkins, and you are partners and part owners of Golden Boy Promotions. Can you talk about the division of the company and what percentage of the company you guys have? Are you just part owner of the company's operations in Mexico?

MAB: Oscar relegated certain percentages of the company here in the United States to various people. We're business associates here in the U.S., and I was delighted that he brought me in. I want to work hard to show him that he didn't make a mistake. I'm really excited about it.

The Ring: There have been a lot of great Mexican fighters. Where would you put yourself on the list of the greatest fighters in Mexican history?

MAB: Damn, that's a tough one. There's been so many great Mexican fighters that I'm probably at the end of that list. The thing is, every champ has his moment. Carlos Zarate had his time, Ruben Olivares had his time. There's also Miguel Canto and Pipino Cuevas. They all had their eras. When they were champs, they were all number one. I grew up watching Julio Cesar Chavez. His fights were always big events when I was growing up and I still admire and respect him. With all the great Mexican fighters out there, I'd put myself behind all of them. ■

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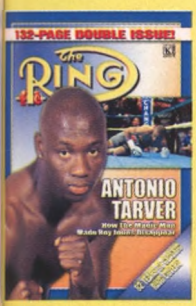

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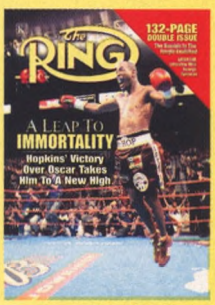

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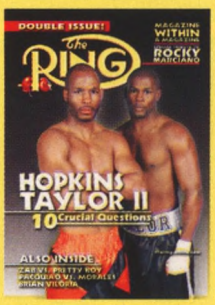

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PONGSAKLEK WONJONGKAM

The Lord Of The Flys Is Ready To Invade U.S.

By Scott Mallon

Hidden deep in the maze of a non-descript, residential neighborhood in Bangkok is WBC flyweight title-holder Pongsaklek Wonjongkam's home away from home, the Petchyindee Gym. The gym is outdoors, as are all boxing gyms in Thailand, and if not for the small sign in front, one would never know it is the abode of many prominent boxers and Muay Thai fighters.

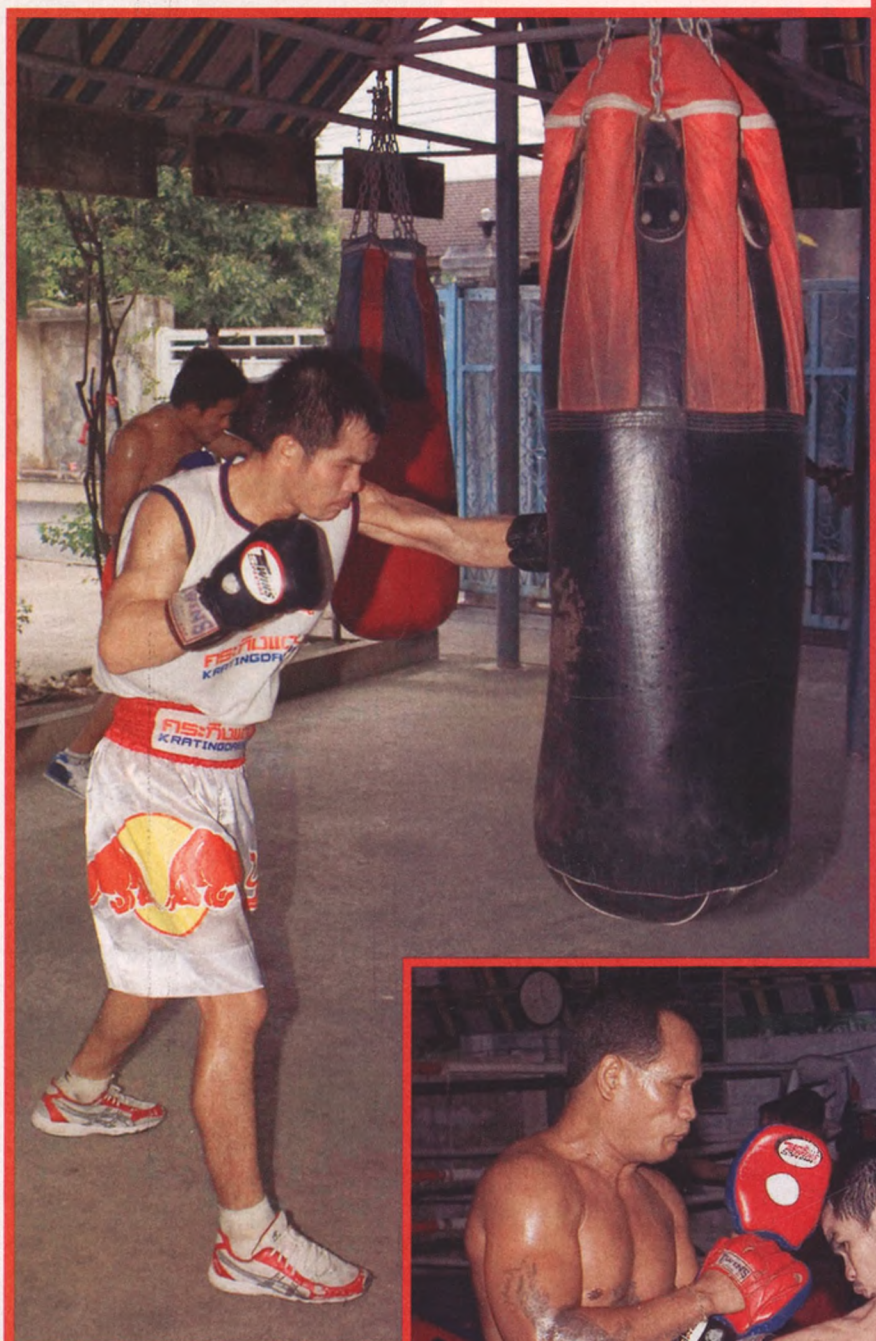
The 28-year-old Wonjongkam doesn't look like a veteran of 110 professional fights. His boyish looks, coupled with reserved manner, belie both his age and his occupation. But broach the subject of boxing, and the shyness disappears, his eyes light up, and you realize he's a warrior in disguise.

Southpaw Wonjongkam comes from the small but bustling city of Nakorn Ratchisima in the Issan province of Northeast Thailand. It's the poorest area of the country, consisting mainly of small villages and rice fields. Tradition remains extremely important in the region, as it does in the rest of the country, with Western technology increasingly existing side-by-side with ancient Eastern philosophies. Reverence to the family remains first and foremost as it has for centuries. Adolescents, both male and female, feel an overwhelming obligation to provide for their parents and extended families.

Although the majority of poor, farm boys from the Issan province have limited educations and know very little about the ways of business, they do know it's possible to forge a better life through boxing. Wonjongkam was one such boy. At the age of 12, he began training

Thailand's Wonjongkam poses in front of a Saan Phra Phum, or Spirit Shrine, near the Petchyindee Gym in Bangkok, where he both trains and lives. Wonjongkam, THE RING's number-one rated flyweight and the WBC titleholder, hasn't lost since 1996.

PHOTO BY SCOTT MALLON



PHOTOS BY SCOTT MALLON

in Muay Thai, the national sport of Thailand. Vaguely resembling kickboxing, Muay Thai not only uses punches and kicks, but also elbows and knees.

Wonjongkam began fighting on a monthly basis in small villages throughout the country, sharpening his skills and learning his craft. For the next five years he plied his trade, building a 40-10 record and eventually fighting in Bangkok's famed Lumpinee Stadium.

Even so, Wonjongkam's boxing ability had always been far superior to his Muay Thai skills, and shortly after turning 17, he decided, on the advice of one of his trainers, to make conventional boxing his exclusive profession. The fact that the financial rewards of boxing were potentially greater than in Muay Thai made the decision that much easier.

When THE RING visited recently, Wonjongkam was hard at work as he progressed quietly and purposefully from shadowboxing to the focus mitts, the heavybag, double-end bag, and finally to some light sparring. He is unassuming and is treated no differently than any other fighter in the gym.

Wonjongkam pounds the heavybag (above) and works on the mitts with assistant trainer and former Muay Thai titleholder Somsak Udomdan (right) at the outdoor Petchyindee Gym. Even though he has held the WBC title since 2001, Wonjongkam is given no special status and is treated just like all of the other fighters in the gym.

Like the majority of Thailand's fighters, Wonjongkam leads a relatively Spartan lifestyle in comparison to his Western counterparts. He lives at the Petchyindee Gym virtually year-round, sharing space with 30 to 40 other fighters, only leaving after a fight to visit his mother back home in Nakorn Ratchisima. A week or two later, he is back at the gym, working for his family, his future, and his legacy.

Wonjongkam doesn't drink, doesn't smoke, and he doesn't carouse with women. He trains religiously six days a week and is never out of shape. Sunday is his only day off, which he normally spends watching videos and running errands. He lives to fight and, most importantly, to support his family.

To Petchyindee camp administrator Charoenchai Suriyawut, there is no other way. "Sometimes we've caught fighters getting complacent," Suriyawut said. "One former champion used to go for his morning run, but would instead visit his girlfriend. On his way back to the gym, he'd pour water over himself to look like he'd been running. He wasn't champion much longer. We don't ever have to worry about this with Pongsaklek; he's very diligent about his training."

Such a rigorous work ethic has certainly proven beneficial. Wonjongkam, 58-2 (31), has reigned as the WBC flyweight titleholder for almost five years and has defended the belt 12 times since knocking out Filipino Malcolm Tunacao in the first round in March 2001 to capture the title. Moreover, he is THE RING's number-one 112-pound contender and is undefeated in his last 49 bouts.

Wonjongkam made his professional debut on December 21, 1994, scoring a third-round kayo of Bernardo Jun Davalos in Bangkok. After eight straight wins, he suffered his first setback, losing an eight-round decision to 43-fight veteran Jerry Pahayahay of the Philippines. Three fights later, Wonjongkam fought Pahayahay for the second time, only to suffer the lone knockout loss of his career. The duo met for a third time in 1998, and a more seasoned and better-prepared Wonjongkam won a 10-round decision.

PHOTO BY KAZUHIRO NOGI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Wonjongkam rips a right uppercut into the bloody face of Daisuke Naito en route to a seventh-round technical decision victory in Tokyo, Japan, on October 10. The victory upped the Thai's impressive record to 58-2 (31).

"Pahayahay was a very experienced and crafty veteran, and I was really still a baby in boxing," said Wonjongkam. "Even when I finally defeated him two years later, he was still a difficult fighter for me."

Surprisingly, Wonjongkam does not consider Pahayahay his toughest opponent to date.

"Alex Baba was extremely tough, very, very strong," he said. "I suffered a bad cut from a headbutt in the fourth round, and from that round on I was dizzy. I don't remember much, but somehow I managed to win the fight."

That he did. When his cut became too serious for him to continue, Wonjongkam prevailed via eighth-round technical decision by tallies of 79-71 and 79-73 (twice) to retain his alphabet strap.

In his most recent outing, Wonjongkam fought a rematch with Japan's Daisuke Naito. Four years earlier, he faced the then-undefeated Naito in Khon Kaen, Thailand. The challenger came out in the first round taunting Wonjongkam, who promptly—and much to the delight of the Thai crowd—knocked Naito out with one punch, 34 seconds into the match.

To his credit, Naito reeled off eight consecutive victories after the devastating defeat. He was hungry to avenge the loss and prove that his lone defeat was a fluke. "It is I who has the greater knockout power, not Pongsaklek," boasted Naito. "The first fight I was careless. In our rematch I will knock him out."

Naito was only partially correct. Wonjongkam does rely mainly on his savvy boxing skills to garner victory. Generally, he wears down or knocks out his opponents with an accumulation of punches. But in his October 10, 2005, rematch with Naito in Tokyo, Wonjongkam battered the gutsy and motivated challenger from the start. The bout was stopped in the seventh round due to a

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Although the vast majority of Wonjongkam's fights have been in Thailand, he's made several defenses of the WBC strap in Japan, including a 12-round decision over Masaki "Trash" Nakanuma in Yokahama in 2004 (top) and a fifth-round TKO of Noriyuki Komatsu in Osaka in 2005 (above).

cut Naito suffered from an accidental headbutt, and Wonjongkam retained the title via unanimous technical decision by triple scores of 68-64.

Like fellow countryman and former WBA junior bantamweight titleholder Khaosai Galaxy, the only Thai boxer enshrined in the International Boxing Hall of Fame, Wonjongkam has never fought outside of Asia. But he almost came to the United States in 2005 to fight popular Mexican Jorge Arce. The bout was supposed to be part of the Lucia Rijker-Christy Martin pay-per-view show, but a disagreement over money and the eventual cancellation of the card, due to an injury to Rijker, scuttled the trip.

According to his camp, Wonjongkam was originally supposed to be paid $250,000 by Top Rank, but as the fight drew near, he was then informed he would only be receiving $160,000. When the card fell apart, Thai promoter Virat Vachchiraratanawongse offered Arce $100,000 to come to Thailand to fight for the title. The offer was rejected and the future of the match now remains uncertain.

"I was looking forward to going to America for the Arce fight and was very disappointed when it didn't happen," said Wonjongkam. "I would like to prove myself to American boxing fans and want to fight there very much."

Arce apparently thinks otherwise, and before his recent two-round destruction of Hussein Hussein, he was particularly vocal, saying of Wonjongkam, "He doesn't want to fight, he's going in circles, he's scared."

While Arce is entitled to his opinion, there's no way that Wonjongkam is scared of him. It's more complicated than that. When Wonjongkam's sponsor, Kratingdaeng (Red Bull), and promoter (Vachchiraratanawongse) tell him to fight, he fights. When they tell him they don't think a deal is what it should be, he listens. There are few conflicts between them, and Wonjongkam refers to both as "his boss."

Currently, the WBC appears to be playing games with Wonjongkam's immediate future. In October, at the

WBC's annual convention, in La Linea de la Concepcion, Spain, President Jose Sulaiman said, "World champion Pongsaklek Wonjongkam of Thailand must next fight number-one ranked official challenger Rosendo Alvarez of Nicaragua." But due to a hand injury suffered by Wonjongkam in the Naito fight, it now looks like Alvarez will be fighting the WBC's so-called "interim champion," Jorge Arce.

Wonjongkam has repeatedly stated he's willing to test his skills against any flyweight put in the ring with him. "I'd like to fight Lorenzo Parra, Vic Darchinyan, Rosendo Alvarez, and, of course, Jorge Arce," said the Thai fighter. "I will fight anyone my promoter wants me to. I'd like to unify the title. However, boxing is a business, and I think this is a difficult goal to achieve."

So for now, at least, while Wonjongkam sits atop the flyweight division, it would take a victory over number-two contender Parra or perhaps number-three contender Darchinyan to garner THE RING championship belt. At this point, Wonjongkam has no plans to move up in weight and hopes to retire after another three to four years in the ring.

Meanwhile, with every victory and title defense, Wonjongkam inches closer toward greatness. He needs three more successful defenses to surpass the record for flyweight title defenses, currently held by Miguel Canto. He is also rapidly closing in on Jimmy Wilde's title-reign record of seven-plus years. One or two career-defining wins would go a long way toward cementing Wonjongkam's legacy and perhaps enable him to eventually join Galaxy in the IBHOF.

It is unlikely, however, that the reserved Wonjongkam will join Galaxy—who remains a household name in Thailand due to his post-boxing career as a movie and TV star—as a public figure after he quits boxing. For Wonjongkam, all roads will one day lead him back to his beloved farm in Nakorn Ratchisima. ■

Scott Mallon is a freelance writer living in Thailand.

PHOTO BY COURTESY OF WARRIOR BOXING

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Wonjongkam is eager to tangle with the other top-rated flyweights, including Vic Darchinyan (left), Jorge Arce (below), and Lorenzo Parra (bottom).

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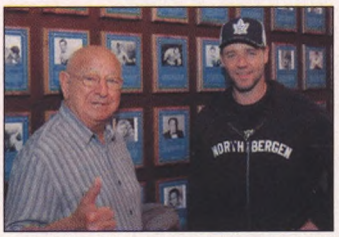

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The Sweetest Of Sweet Scientists

TODAY'S 10 BEST DEFENSIVE FIGHTERS

By Gavin Evans

The basic idea of boxing is to hit without being hit. Most boxers, if halfway sane, do not go out of their way to absorb punches just for the hell of it. It might not always look that way to the casual viewer, but even those famed for their machismo—Ricky Hatton or the peak Mike Tyson, for instance—are adept at avoiding in-coming flak. The wisest of these brawlers or those opting for longevity, tend to reinvent themselves as defensive specialists. Roberto Duran and Marco Antonio Barrera would be prime examples.

But there are some who go further, who pride themselves on being able to go the distance without taking any hurt. Now and then we find one of these masters getting roared to the rafters due to flash audacity and force of personality—Muhammad Ali, Willy Pep, Benny Leonard, Kid Gavilan—but more often their skills tend to be an acquired taste, less easily digested than the red meat of the two-fisted fighter (think Gene Tunney in relation to Jack Dempsey, Pernell Whitaker to Julio Cesar Chavez, Lennox Lewis to Mike Tyson).

One fundamental, shared by all the take-none-to-land-one greats, falls under the cover-all banner of reflex-timing-coordination-anticipation. In other words, that seemingly in-built propensity to see a punch coming and to do something to avoid it. When combined with speed of foot and the ability to dance in and out of range without being caught, it can be more than enough, at least for as long as it lasts.

A classic case is Naseem Hamed. At his brief peak, Naz was almost impossible to tag. Boxing with head high and hands low he would dance, twist, turn, and slip out of the way, and the punches would sail by. But fast living took away his speed and lack of training his reflexes, and suddenly, he became a fighter who kept getting tagged, because he'd forgotten what he'd learnt about defensive technique.

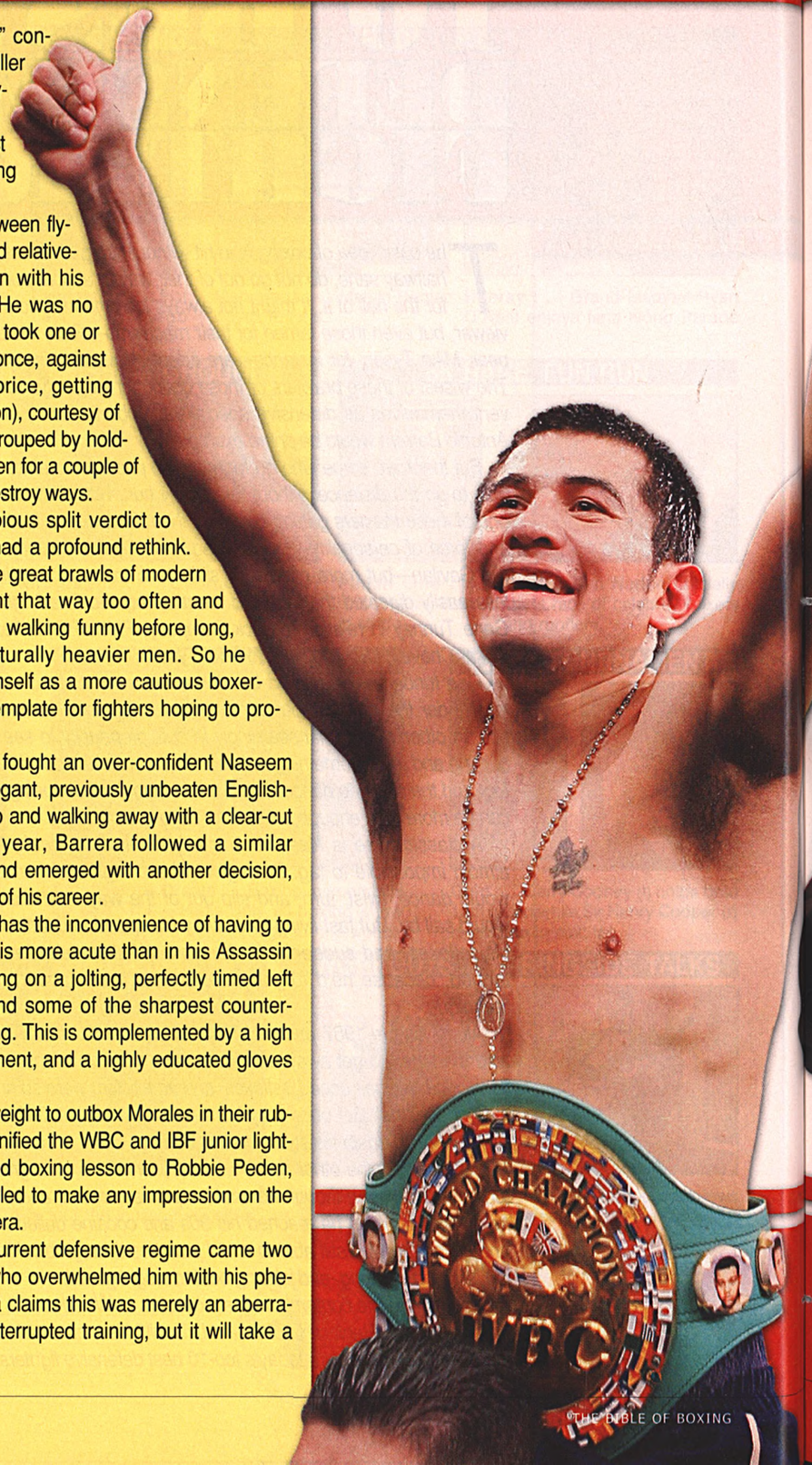
Ali, in his pre-1967 prime or Roy Jones until the first Tarver fight, also managed to get away with flouting the normal defensive conventions because their speed, reflexes, and athleticism were so superior to their opponents'. But once they lost that edge, they started getting hit. Ali had time to adapt his style; for Jones it's too late.

Whitaker, on the other hand, was a boxer with a solid grasp of the fundamentals, even though he could improvise, invent, and play when he felt like it. When he reached his 30s and cocaine dulled his speed and timing, he was still able to avoid punches through blocking, parrying, slipping, ducking, and jabbing behind a tight guard.

So who are the contemporary successors to Whitaker, Ali, and Pep or, if you prefer, Benitez, Loche, and Driscoll? It's a hard pick, but here, in alphabetical order, are today's top-10 best defensive fighters.

MARCO ANTONIO BARERRA

PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES



The name "Baby Faced Assassin" conjures up images of a single-minded killer whose sole concern is to land the payload punch. And that's pretty much described this great Mexican for the first 11 years and 50-odd fights of his long and productive career.

In those days, when competing between flyweight and super bantam, Barrera stood relatively square on, all the better to close in with his potent hooks to the body and head. He was no slouch defensively, but occasionally he took one or two more than strictly necessary and once, against Junior Jones in 1996, he paid the price, getting stopped in five (officially a disqualification), courtesy of a cracking right to the chin. Barrera regrouped by holding Jones to a disputed decision and then for a couple of years returned to his old, search-and-destroy ways.

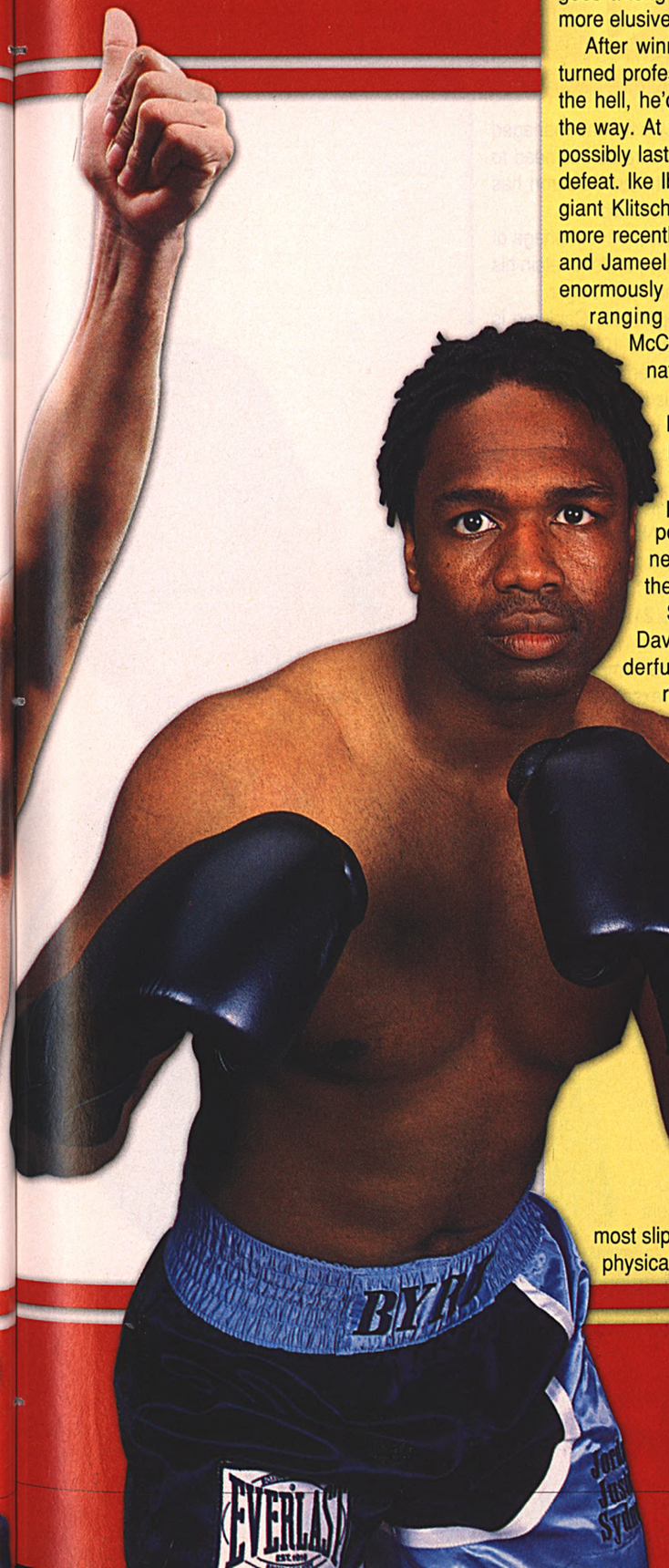
But in 2000, after dropping a dubious split verdict to perennial rival Erik Morales, Barrera had a profound rethink. The Morales bout had been one of the great brawls of modern boxing, but as Barrera realized, fight that way too often and there's a danger you'll be talking and walking funny before long, particularly if competing against naturally heavier men. So he changed his approach, reinventing himself as a more cautious boxer-puncher, and in the process set the template for fighters hoping to prolong their careers at the top.

It all came together when Barrera fought an over-confident Naseem Hamed in 2001. He surprised the arrogant, previously unbeaten Englishman by boxing behind an educated jab and walking away with a clear-cut unanimous decision. The following year, Barrera followed a similar approach in his return with Morales and emerged with another decision, setting the pattern for the second stage of his career.

Today's version of Barrera seldom has the inconvenience of having to absorb anything too nasty. He stance is more acute than in his Assassin days, and he moves more while relying on a jolting, perfectly timed left jab to keep opponents off-balance and some of the sharpest counter-punching skills in the contemporary ring. This is complemented by a high guard, low chin, plenty of head movement, and a highly educated gloves and arms defense.

Barrera moved beyond his natural weight to outbox Morales in their rubber match and then, last time out, he unified the WBC and IBF junior lightweight belts by dishing out a one-sided boxing lesson to Robbie Peden, who despite his speed and strength failed to make any impression on the far more technically accomplished Barrera.

Barrera's one setback under his current defensive regime came two years ago against Manny Pacquiao, who overwhelmed him with his phenomenal speed and work rate. Barrera claims this was merely an aberration, caused by a lack of focus and interrupted training, but it will take a return before we know for sure.



Every time this nice guy from Flint, Michigan, steps into the ring he is the smaller, weaker, lighter-fisted fellow, but he invariably goes a long way to canceling these deficits by being significantly more elusive than the opposition.

After winning middleweight silver at the 1992 Olympics, Byrd turned professional weighing 169 pounds and then decided, what the hell, he'd skip light heavyweight and cruiserweight and go all the way. At first the move was viewed as a gimmick that couldn't possibly last, but after a while he convinced the doubters, even in defeat. Ike Ibeabuchi flattened him in five, he seldom reached the giant Klitschko brothers (and Wladimir dropped him twice), and, more recently, lesser mortals like Andrew Golota, Fres Oquendo, and Jameel McCline have troubled him. But his results are still enormously impressive when you consider the size differentials, ranging from 12 pounds against Oquendo to 56 against McCline, and perhaps even more because of Byrd's inclination to enter the ring lighter than his official weight.

Byrd once had the temerity to compare himself to Muhammad Ali, but perhaps he was overreaching a bit there. He never had quite the foot speed, fluidity, or inclination to switch from defense to attack of the prime version of "The Greatest," and while Ali was no powerpuncher, he managed to stop most of his opponents, whereas Byrd has scored just one stoppage in the last five years.

Still, at his own peak, when out-boxing the likes of David Tua and Evander Holyfield, Byrd relied on his wonderfully finely tuned inner radar, his persistent, snappy right jab, superb conditioning, and the kind of unpredictable, spinning and rolling movement that opponents deride as simply "awkward." As he put it: "I'm a southpaw, I've got good skills for a heavyweight, I can outbox anyone, and I'm not even a true heavyweight. Other guys cannot face those facts. I call myself 'The Test,' and these guys don't want to take the test because they really can't study for it. I'm difficult to fight and I'm very competitive."

Today Byrd is more flat-footed and has lost a fraction of a second in reflex response, and therefore takes more punches than a few years ago. But his head movement and the way he uses his arms, gloves, and feet still makes him a hard man to tag cleanly, and he's still as competitive as ever. He remains one of the most slippery boxers in the division, which is why, despite all his physical disadvantages, he's still a factor at the age of 35.

PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

CHRIS BYRD

IVAN CALDERON

When you're a 5', sub-105 pound, 30-year-old southpaw who has managed just five stoppages in your 23-fight professional career, you sure as hell need to have something extra to get noticed. Which is exactly what Ivan Calderon has achieved back home in Puerto Rico and, increasingly, in the U.S. too.

His fans adore him because, despite his lack of size and apparent shortage of finishing power, he's a highly entertaining boxer, using his flashy skills to retain his unbeaten record, invariably against men who are taller and naturally bigger.

Although he only holds the low-rent WBO minimum weight belt, Calderon is pressing hard to win recognition as the number-one man in the 105-pound division, overcoming his physical disadvantages through his remarkable speed, extraordinarily quick reflexes, versatility, and the legacy of his long amateur pedigree, which left him with a refined set of defensive skills.

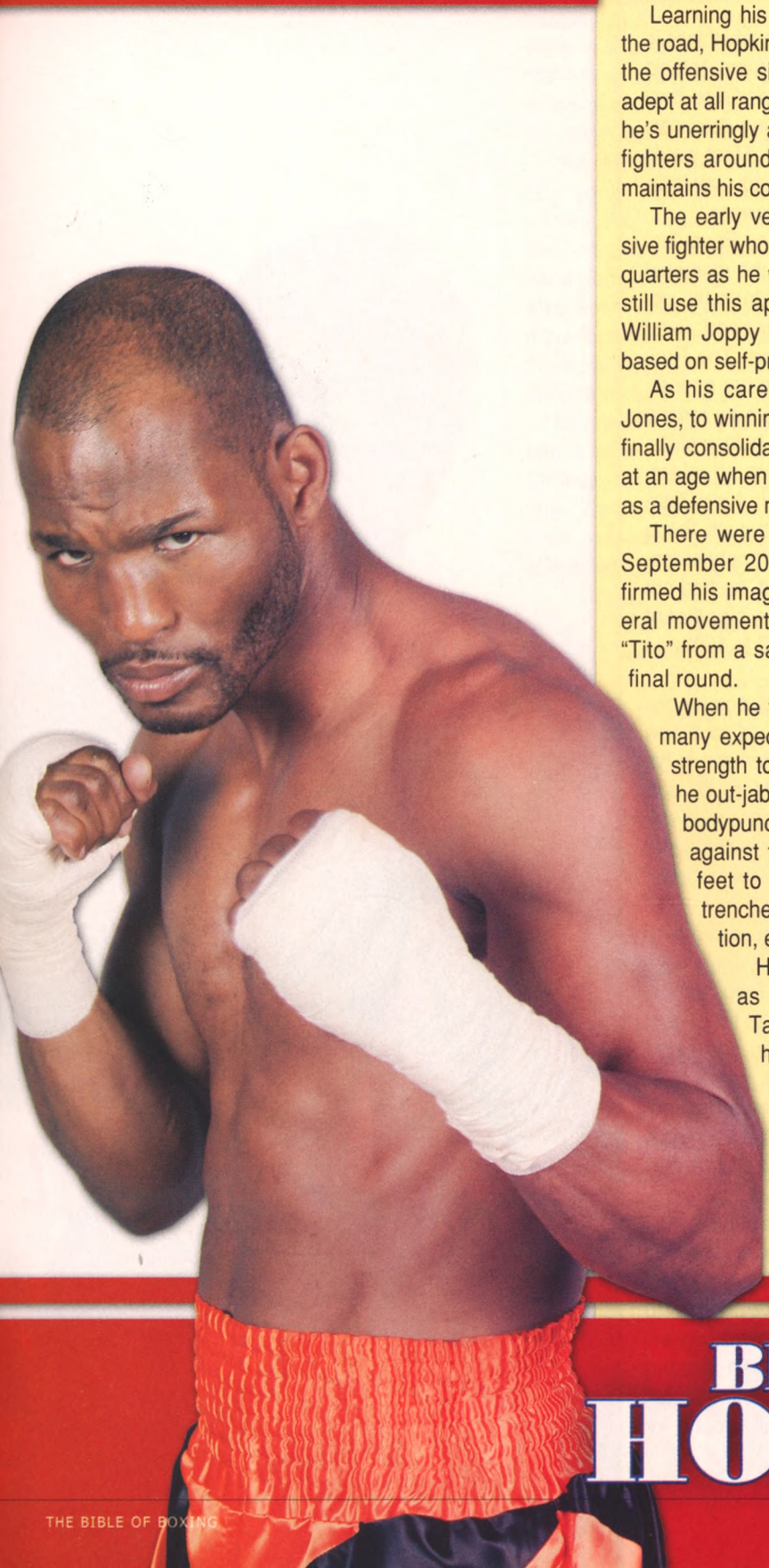
His favored style is that of a quick-fisted, fast-moving boxer-puncher, who is happy to glide in an out, using his outstanding footwork, his southpaw jab, blinding combinations, and solid bodypunching to get results. This relatively aggressive approach was used when, for example, wearing down Noel Tunaceo for a ninth-round stoppage in April or in giving away six pounds in stopping Edgar Cardenas in 11 rounds last March. In this kind of mood, "Iron Boy" Calderon seems to have more serious firepower than his 21 percent stoppage ratio would suggest.

But when the occasion demands the Puerto Rican has no compunction about sticking and moving to get the result. Take, for example, his fight with Mexico's heavy-handed southpaw Robert Leyva last July. The shorter Calderon kept matters at long range for most of the bout, where his quicker hands and feet and better accuracy secured the points. In the middle rounds, Calderon moved in to work the body and started getting caught with hard hooks to the head, so he returned to his stick-and-move style to pick up a four-point unanimous decision on each of the cards. As Calderon put it: "It turned out to be a hard fight, so I had to change my style and use my skills to outbox him."

Calderon's long, 130-bout (110 wins) amateur career included winning three out of four against Brian Viloria (currently WBC light flyweight titleholder) and, amazingly, a points win over current light welterweight hotshot Miguel Cotto (at light flyweight). "He beat me," Cotto admits. "He kicked my ass." Calderon also picked up the New York Golden Gloves title, but dropped a disputed decision in the opening round of the 2000 Olympics before turning professional at the advanced age of 26 in 2001.

Caldron turns 31 in January 2006 and has been boxing most of his life, but his face is still unmarked—a tribute to his ability to land punches without absorbing them.

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO



At the age of 40, Hopkins may still be the best middleweight in the world, or pretty close, depending on which way you scored the Jermain Taylor fight. No other 160-pounder in boxing history has lasted at the top so long, and the reason Hopkins has managed it has a great deal to do with the fact that he takes so few clean punches.

Learning his craft in the Philly gyms and in 17 years on the road, Hopkins has mastered every aspect of his craft. On the offensive side, he has every punch in the book. He's adept at all ranges, to the body or head, can lead or counter, he's unerringly accurate, and, let's face it, one of the dirtiest fighters around. On top of that, he has a great chin and maintains his condition at all times.

The early version of "The Executioner" was an aggressive fighter who was as happy ripping up opponents at close quarters as he was boxing them from arms' length. He can still use this approach if necessary, as when beating up William Joppy in December 2003, but he prefers a style based on self-preservation.

As his career progressed—from failure against Roy Jones, to winning the IBF title, to unifying the world title, and finally consolidating his claim as pound-for-pound supreme at an age when most boxers are long retired—his reputation as a defensive master was consolidated.

There were plenty of glimpses earlier, but it was his September 2001 victory over Felix Trinidad that confirmed his image as a boxing master. Using plenty of lateral movement and that quick, sharp jab, he outclassed "Tito" from a safe distance before finishing him off in the final round.

When he fought Oscar De La Hoya three years later, many expected him to use his advantages in size and strength to mount a high pressure attack, but instead he out-jabbed the jabber before ending it with a single bodypunch in round nine. He adapted this approach against the dangerous Howard Eastman, using his feet to keep clear and refusing to engage in the trenches for anything longer than a quick combination, earning a wide unanimous decision.

Hopkins no longer throws as many punches as a few years ago, which cost him against Taylor because he coasted too long and left his surge a bit too late, even though he avoided 81 percent of Taylor's blows. But his reflexes, timing, and ability to move with speed and grace for 12 rounds is remarkable for a man in middle age. His hands are always in place, ready to pick off punches, his head always tucked in, and he takes very few chances.

PHOTO BY JAN SANDERS/HBO

BERNARD HOPKINS

JUAN MANUEL MARQUEZ

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

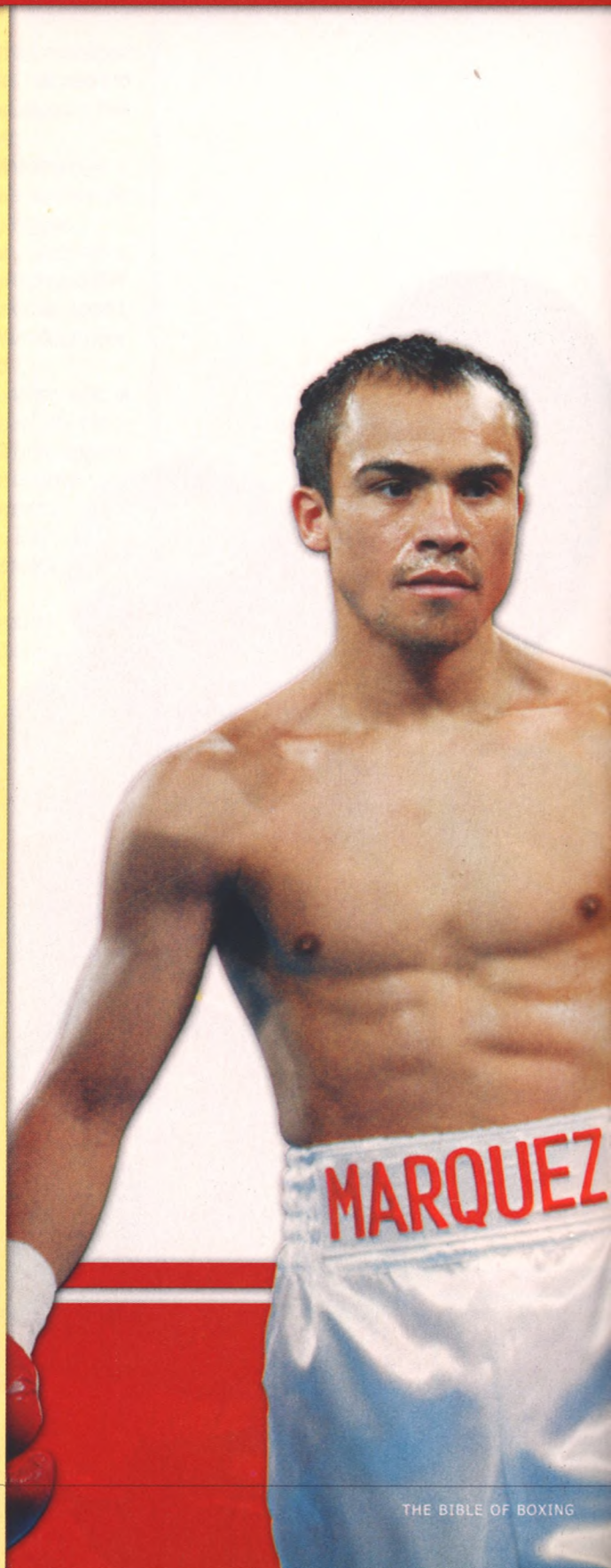
THE RING'S number-one featherweight has several things in common with his more celebrated countryman, Marco Antonio Barrera. Aside from being almost the same age and size, they have both defied the Mexican code by becoming defensive specialists rather than swashbuckling brawlers. Most would put Barrera a long nose ahead overall, but Marquez may have a slight edge when it comes to pure defensive prowess.

Take, for instance, their fights against Manny Pacquiao. Barrera was unable to cope with the speed of the mercurial Filipino southpaw, and in the end succumbed from the accumulation of punches. Marquez, on the other hand, used his defensive genius to adapt after a dire start. The Pac-Man dumped him on the canvas three times in the opener, but from then on Marquez astounded ringsiders by forcing his way back into the fight through his superior boxing skills. He began picking off Pacquiao with accurate counters, while showing remarkable defensive dexterity in his willingness to stay within range. He would slip and duck those impossibly fast combinations and reply with stiff right crosses and jolting left hooks. By the end of the fight, he had not only out-landed Pac-Man overall, but had a significant advantage when it came to powerpunches (122 to 100) and fully deserved the draw.

Marquez' most recent win confirmed his reputation for giving without taking. Faced with the technically sound southpaw Victor Polo, who had soundly outboxed Scott Harrison in his previous bout (only to get a ludicrous draw), Marquez outclassed the tall Colombian, showing none of his previous vulnerability to southpaws. He used his superior defensive skill and his edge in power and strength to work his way inside, winning by margins of 13, 11, and nine points.

Marquez is unbeaten in 16 fights since losing on points to southpaw Freddie Norwood for the WBA title six years ago, and his victims include serious opponents like Polo, Robbie Peden (who vomited after retiring in his corner at the end of round 10), Manuel Medina (stopped in seven one-sided rounds five months before upsetting Harrison), and a terrified Derrick Gainer (who lost all seven completed rounds). Unrealistic financial demands have kept him from a rematch with Pacquiao, and Marquez has yet to secure a career-defining victory.

Like Barrera, he boxes behind a high guard with his chin low and relies on his sharp reflexes to block, parry, slip, and duck before coming in with perfectly timed counters. He hits hard enough (33 kayos in 44 wins), but his reluctance to take punishment means he takes very few chances, preferring to break down opponents slowly rather than blasting them out. This might prevent him from achieving hero status back home, but it will also help ensure he's still around for several years to come.



"Pretty Boy" Floyd can be a monster outside the ring, volatile, conceited, and occasionally violent, but when he declares himself as the finest boxer in the world, nobody can mount a serious argument. His painfully one-sided victory over Arturo Gatti provided the decisive proof.

Gatti, having incorporated some science to his game, made the mistake of thinking he could outbox Mayweather, but the two men were in a different league. Pretty Boy's speed and technique meant that the naturally bigger Gatti was firing blanks while absorbing frightening punishment from the fastest hands in the world, which forced his retirement after six rounds.

"He doesn't have any flaws, he's a complete fighter like me," said Roy Jones after watching Mayweather dismantle Henry Brusseles earlier this year. Actually, unlike Jones, Mayweather does not depend primarily on his natural gifts to get results. His speed of hand, foot, and reflex is unsurpassed in contemporary boxing, but he also possesses the technical skills of the old masters, and a few more besides. His hands are always ready to parry, he twists and turns his body and head to take the impact out of punches, his balance is perfect, and his jab may be the best in his division.

Men who assume they can rough him up on the inside face a rude shock when they try. Just ask IBF lightweight titleholder Jesus Chavez. Mayweather's ability to slip and block up-close is remarkable. By pivoting his head, shoulders, and torso, the short hooks slide past him harmlessly, and then he comes back with blistering combinations of his own. Taller men like Phillip Ndou and Diego Corrales, who tried to use their reach advantage to catch him from long range, also found it impossible to land cleanly and were stopped in one-sided fights.

Only one professional boxer has come close to upsetting Mayweather. In April 2002 Pretty Boy ventured from junior lightweight to lightweight to challenge then-WBC 135-pound titlist Jose Luis Castillo. The larger Mexican stayed on top of him, using constant pressure to hold him to a unanimous but disputed decision. In the return, however, there was no doubt about the verdict, as Mayweather used his speed and lateral movement to win clearly. Since then, Mayweather has shown further improvement, to the point where his only weakness seems to be his fragile hands.

Mayweather's offensive brilliance makes him an exciting fighter, although he is not nearly as marketable as he assumes. But it is his defensive brilliance that makes him, pound-for-pound, the best fighter in the world. As he put it: "I got that nickname (Pretty Boy) not because of my looks, but because when my fight's finished, I never came out cut or bruised."

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

FLOYD MAYWEATHER

FERNANDO MONTIEL

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

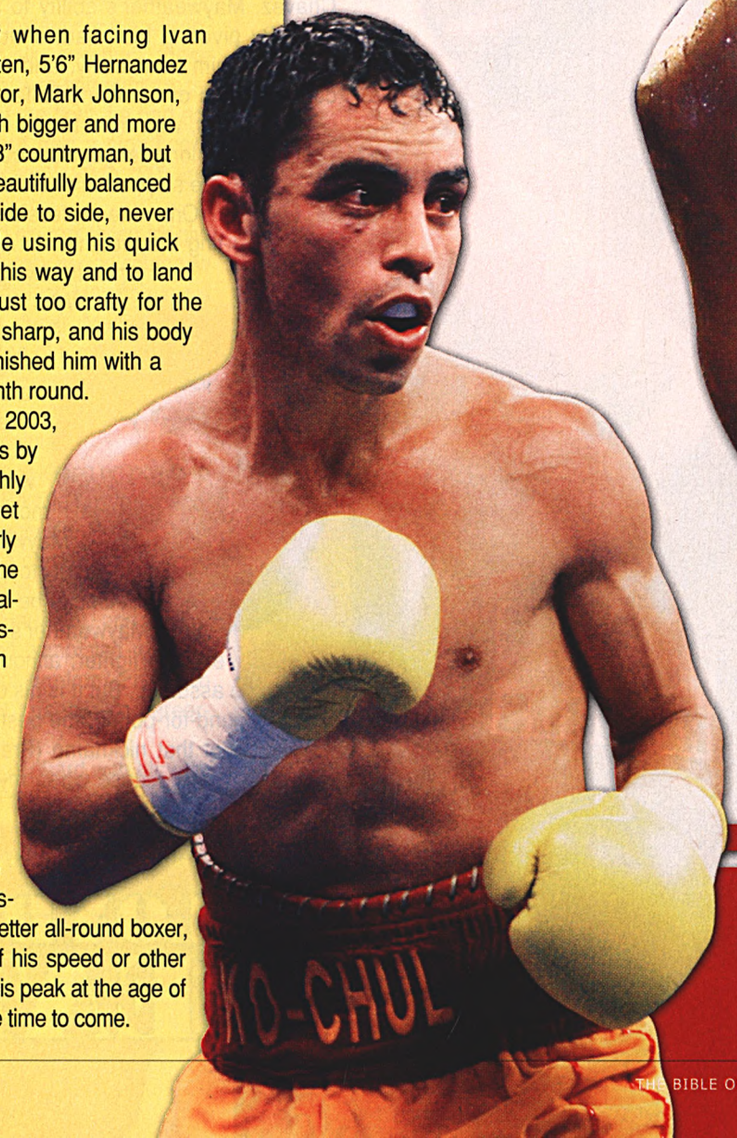
This flashy super fly is the antithesis of the usual Mexican fighter. He prefers running to trading, is often more concerned about avoiding punches than landing them, and he doesn't have the firmest chin either. On top of that he's small, even for a 115-pounder, has an effete, fragile look about him, and his stance is more upright than other fighters from south of the border. And yet he can be a joy to behold because his refined skills, hand speed, foot work, brutal body attack, and his dazzling combinations.

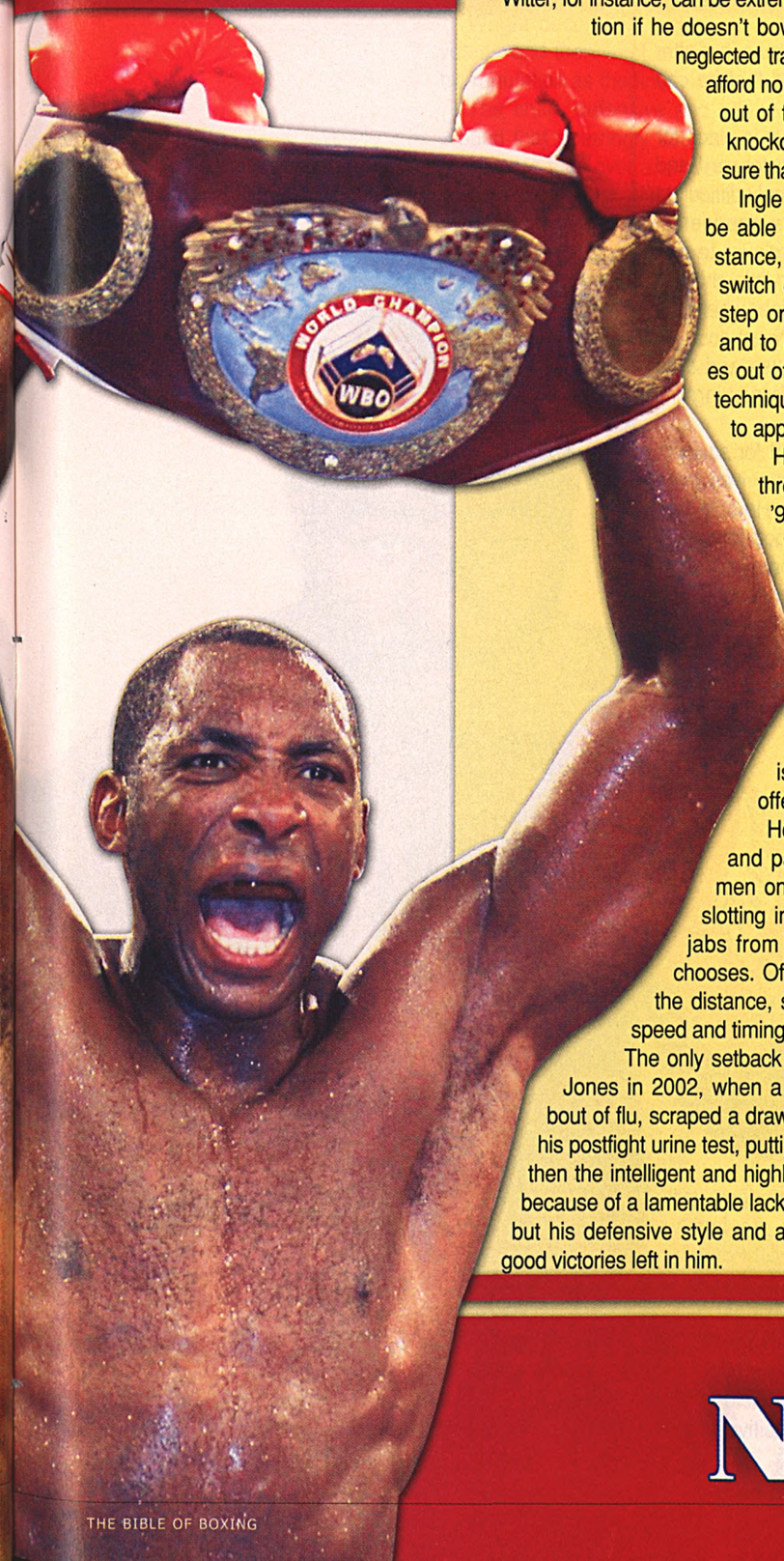
On those occasions, you can be forgiven for drawing on memories of those old films of Benny Leonard circling the ring from his upright stance, moving in and out, blocking, parrying and slipping while stabbing out educated, well-timed punches. There are few men in boxing today, and none within Montiel's weight range, who can equal his superb array of well-honed defensive skills, and invariably these make up for his shortfalls in physical strength and durability.

It all came together perfectly when facing Ivan Hernandez in April 2005. The unbeaten, 5'6" Hernandez had flattened Montiel's sole conqueror, Mark Johnson, and was on a roll. He looked so much bigger and more powerful than his slope-shouldered 5'3" countryman, but he had no clue how to hit him. The beautifully balanced Montiel moved at high speed from side to side, never presenting a stationary target, while using his quick hands to parry everything that came his way and to land beautifully timed counters. He was just too crafty for the powerful 22-year-old, his jab was too sharp, and his body attack too persistent. Montiel finally finished him with a series of hooks to the liver in the seventh round.

Nearly two years earlier, in August 2003, Montiel lost for the only time in 33 fights by dropping a majority decision to a highly motivated Mark Johnson. He was set back by being overly cautious in the early rounds and a knockdown in the fifth (the third of his career), and although he rallied, he couldn't quite catch up. It is possible that Montiel was still suffering from the emotional undertow of his victory over Pedro Alcazar a year earlier. He hammered the previously unbeaten Panamanian to defeat in the sixth round. Two days later Alcazar died as a result of brain injuries.

Montiel has won five in a row since the Johnson fight, four inside the distance, and seems to have become a better all-round boxer, hitting harder without sacrificing any of his speed or other defensive advantages. He is reaching his peak at the age of 26, but will probably be around for some time to come.





JOHNNY NELSON

Mention Brendan Ingle's famous Sheffield gym and the names that pop up are Naseem Hamed, Herol Graham, and, today, Junior Witter. But perhaps the finest advertisement for the old Irishman's unorthodox approach to the art of self-defense is Johnny Nelson, a cruiserweight without the power or natural gifts of these luminaries, but with the application few can surpass.

Witter, for instance, can be extremely elusive, but has a tendency to lose concentration if he doesn't bowl them over early, while Hamed and Graham neglected training at key stages of their careers. Nelson can afford no such luxury. His focus never wavers, he's seldom out of training, and because he lacks the one-punch knockout power of some of his gymmates, he makes sure that his technique is impeccable.

Ingle has long emphasized the need for his lads to be able to defend themselves at any range, from any stance, with or without their hands. They all learn to switch effortlessly from orthodox to southpaw, to lean, step or slide away from punches or roll inside them, and to use their hands and elbows for parrying punches out of the air. Nelson took many years to master the techniques and even longer to develop the confidence to apply him against the best.

He lost nine of his 14 amateur bouts and his first three professional fights. Then, between 1992 and '95, he lost six out of 11 (though mostly to heavyweights and several on dubious decisions). And yet, it is a decade since he lost a fight and 12 years since he lost to a cruiserweight (and that on doubtful disqualification), and along the way he's beaten some sound opposition, including Ezra Sellers, Carl Thompson, Marcelo Dominguez, and Jimmy Thunder. The contemporary version of Nelson is devilishly difficult to tag cleanly and no slouch offensively.

He dances out of range, rolls and ducks, blocks and parries, moves his head, and ties up stronger men on the inside. And while this is happening he is slotting in stiff, well-timed digs, including long, accurate jabs from both hands, depending on which stance he chooses. Of his 19 wins since 1995, 12 have come inside the distance, several on clean knockouts, a product of hand speed and timing rather than raw power.

The only setback over the last 10 years came against Guillermo Jones in 2002, when a lethargic Nelson, who was recovering from a bout of flu, scraped a draw. However, Jones tested positive for steroids at his postfight urine test, putting his aggressive showing in perspective. Since then the intelligent and highly articulate Nelson has fought just once a year because of a lamentable lack of promotional interest. He turns 39 in January, but his defensive style and all-year conditioning suggest he still has a few good victories left in him.

PHOTO BY LARS BARON/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

JAMES TONEY

PHOTO BY JAN SANDERS

Old "Lights Out" is short, fat, old, and injury prone, but after 75 professional fights, his technique is so good that he can still beat most of the heavyweight top 10.

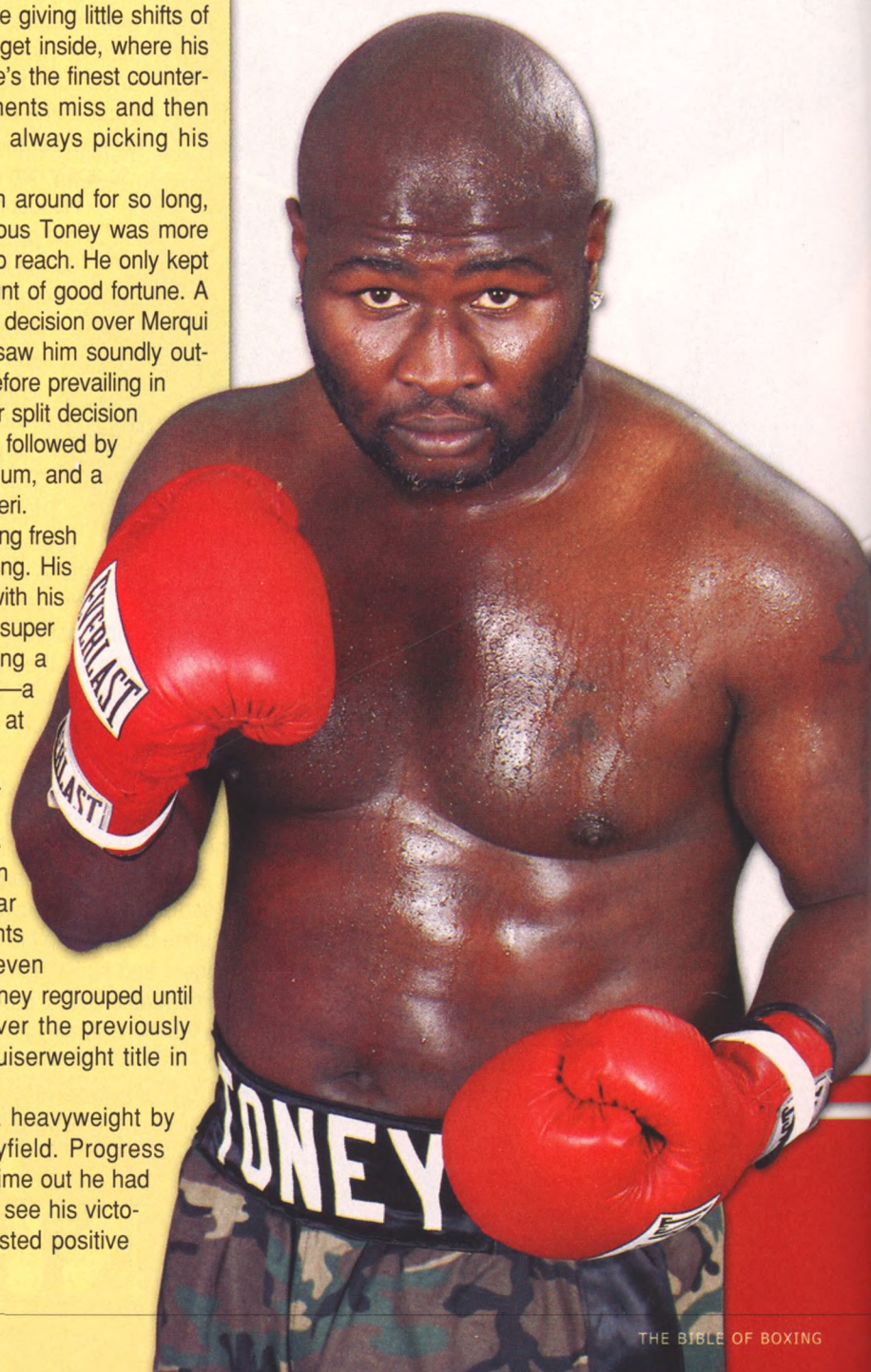
His balance is perfect and his feet are always in place for optimum punching room. One little stutter step forward and he's in range to let his hands go and he's extremely difficult to hit cleanly. Toney has learnt to second-guess opponents, anticipating their next move, and then using his gloves to pick off the punches or moving his head while giving little shifts of shoulders, rolling under the punches to get inside, where his mastery is unequalled. On top of that, he's the finest counter-puncher in the division, making opponents miss and then using their momentum against them, always picking his punches with sadistic care.

It's hard to recall, because he's been around for so long, but there was a time when the pugnacious Toney was more brawler than boxer, and relatively easy to reach. He only kept his unbeaten record through a fair amount of good fortune. A draw with Sanderline Williams and a split decision over Merqui Sosa took him to his first title fight that saw him soundly outboxed for 10 rounds by Michael Nunn before prevailing in the 11th. He was lucky to scrape another split decision after being dropped by Reggie Johnson, followed by a draw with the 35-year-old Mike McCallum, and a ludicrous split decision win over Dave Tiberi.

But with each fight Toney was absorbing fresh data on the mysteries of defensive boxing. His commitment waxed and waned, along with his work rate, but by the time he entered the super middleweight division he was developing a reputation as an outstanding all-rounder—a straight, hard puncher extremely adept at avoiding hard punches.

This was thrown into question for a while in the mid-'90s. First, the combination of Roy Jones' speed and Toney's weight troubles saw Lights Out down in the third round before suffering a near shutout, followed by embarrassing points losses to Montell Griffin (twice) and, even worse, Drake Thadzi. But gradually, Toney regrouped until pulling off a unanimous points win over the previously unbeaten Vassiliy Jirov for the IBF cruiserweight title in 2003, 12 years after beating Nunn.

He then transformed himself into a heavyweight by beating the 42-year-old Evander Holyfield. Progress was punctuated by injury, but the next time out he had no trouble outboxing John Ruiz, only to see his victory changed to a no-contest after he tested positive for steroids.



The only time Wright has taken a hard, clean punch in recent memory is when he chose to, a once-off occurrence unlikely to be repeated. In round five of his return with Shane Mosley, he hung his chin out and allowed the smaller man a free shot, and was shaken for the first time in over a decade. "I wanted to show he couldn't hurt me, that I could take a punch, but it was a heck of a punch," he admitted afterward.

Wright deservedly picked up a majority decision—his closest encounter in six years—and then went on to outclass Felix Trinidad by a wide margin, consolidating his reputation as the finest jabber in the game today.

The entire defensive and offensive system of this 5'10" middleweight is based around that unerringly accurate bargepole of a southpaw jab. He slams it into the other guy's face over and over again, and then hooks off it to the body and the head, and then goes back to the jab. Every now and then, a stiff left is added to the mix.

Wright also has good head movement, excellent footwork from his wide stance, a tight fortress behind his arms, and the ability to use his gloves to catch punches, but it's that jab that makes everything possible while keeping him out of harm's way. After 15 years and 55 fights as a professional, only three boxers have any claim to overcoming that impediment, and two of those claims were questionable.

Way back in 1994, a 22-year-old Winky traveled to France, where he dropped a unanimous decision to then-WBA titleholder Julio Cesar Vasquez. The Argentinean was credited with scoring five knockdowns, but at least three were slips (Wright wore the wrong boots) and yet the American won seven, six, and five rounds on the three judges' cards in what was perhaps a legitimate loss, albeit a close one. Four years and 13 wins later, he dropped a majority decision to a rampant Harry Simon in South Africa. This one could have gone either way with Simon's work rate and aggression keeping him in the fight, but in retrospect the draw that was originally announced probably would have been fairer. Then, in 1999, Wright outboxed Fernando Vargas for long stretches, but once again came out on the wrong end of a majority decision that many felt he deserved.

Wright has improved since then, busier, more consistent, and more confident. Despite his age (34) and all those years on the road, there is no reason to suppose he is set for a fall anytime soon. He takes so few punches and stays in shape—the best recipe for longevity. ■

***British freelance writer and regular contributor Gavin Evans' new book* is Kings Of The Ring: The History Of Heavyweight Boxing.**

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

WINKY WRIGHT

The RING Update

NIGEL BENN

DESTROYER-TURNED-PREACHER

By Brian Doogan

He was dressed in black, a color synonymous with his days as "The Dark Destroyer," but apt garb, too, for his new vocation. "Come inside," he said with a benign smile. By the front door of his six-bedroom mansion, high above the Mediterranean Sea on Majorca's Costa del a Calma (Calm Coast) in southern Spain, an open book made out of stone and resting on a plinth bore the inscription: "In heaven is rest and endless peace." Almost serenely, he led the way, through the door and up a marble staircase into the living room where a dozen people or more would congregate that evening to listen to him spreading the Word of God. "I believe that the Lord has called me to do this," he announced, the outstretched hand of Nigel Benn an invitation to take a seat in his church.

It is almost a decade since Benn last appeared in a boxing ring, but the passage of time does not dull the memory of his ferocity. Pugnacious, almost primeval, he took sadistic pleasure out of his "tear-ups," engaging in fights that might have been born on the streets where he grew up in Ilford, east London. His was the personality of a delinquent youth hardened by a four-year career in the First Battalion of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers. He completed two tours of duty in Northern Ireland during the height of The Troubles, "Once you've been in a situation like that," he said at the end of his army days, "you're scared of nobody."

Then and now: Benn as he looked celebrating his victory over Juan Carlos Gimenez in defense of the WBC super middleweight title in 1994 (right), and today, at his home in Majorca, Spain (far right), where he moved after turning his life around.

PHOTO BY MARC Y. MORRIS

PHOTO BY WARWICK UPTON

PHOTO BY WARWICK UPTON

Benn reads from the Bible at his six-bedroom mansion in Majorca, where he also preaches the gospel to a small but growing flock. He recently helped a young man struggling with drug addiction who is now a member of Benn's prayer group.

In 1990, he won the WBO middleweight title from the American, Doug DeWitt, "bashing the granny out of him" in eight rounds before pummeling Iran Barkley to the canvas three times in a single round in "a do-or-die, hell-for-leather" encounter. This was how Benn fought, "taking punishment, dishing it out." He feared no man. Then, in a fiercely fluctuating battle in Birmingham, he was beaten into a ninth-round submission by his nemesis, Chris Eubank, but lost nothing of his gung-ho reputation. Eubank described him as "savage ... strong enough to kill me, and I think he desired to." Five years later, making his fifth defense of the WBC super middleweight title that he had seized from Mauro Galvano, Benn's fists left another American, Gerald McClellan, at death's anteroom. He barely survived. Hugh McIlvanney, the doyen of British sportswriters, described the "relentless, mutually destructive aggression from the principals" as "one of the most brutal fights any of us at ringside had ever witnessed."

PHOTO BY WARWICK UPTON

Far from rainy England, Benn enjoys the sunny Spanish weather, along with fellow Christian ministers Penny and Kerry Cook. Benn believes that it is his destiny to eventually open a church.

Yet here Benn now stood in his Spanish home, "repentant for a sinful life," a man who cooks shepherd's pie, chicken dishes, and Christmas dinner for pensioners in his new neighborhood, whose stated mission in life is to establish his own church so he can "do the work of the Lord."

"My flesh has achieved," he said of his past conquests, "but what have I done spiritually?"

That he even posed the question served to emphasize the metamorphosis

that he has undergone. Once he slew bodies. Now he wants to save souls, like Henry Armstrong and George Foreman, punchers-turned-preachers before him. A self-confessed womanizer ("I've had untold affairs; a lapdancer gave birth to my baby four days before Connor and India, my twins, were born"), Benn has become an avowed family man, faithful to his wife, Carolyne, a loving father to five children. Responsibility and temperance have displaced the malevolent recklessness of old.

"I wasn't like Paul on the road to Damascus," he explained. "I was more like Jonah, disobedient and reliant on the Lord's mercy. I lived with Satan so long that the enemy wouldn't allow me to walk away easily. But by transforming my life—and I have a long way still to go—I know I can transform other people's lives. All I need is this."

He picked up a black leather-bound Bible, opened it to Romans, chapter 12, and began to read: "Therefore I urge you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service."

Benn looked up and smiled, his new life vindicated. But what made The Dark Destroyer see the light?

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He sat in silence as they walked past his car. Occasionally, he would see someone look in and recognize him, failing to understand why he was here, tears rolling down his face, parked late at night by Streatham Common, one of London's landmark parks, and no one dared stop and ask.

But there were plenty of questions he was asking himself. *What have I got? Why do I keep hurting the people who love me? Where am I going with my life?* There were no easy answers, but one conviction was impossible to shake. *I've got nothing, that's what I've got, absolutely nothing.* So he reached for the bottle of white wine, put it to his mouth and emptied it, and poured a handful of sleeping tablets down his throat. Then he turned the ignition key. It was four miles to his home in Beckenham. Somehow he made it and staggered into bed where for two days he would lie comatose. He had cheated on Carolyne again and the guilt he felt had overwhelmed him. This affair, in 1998, would be his last.

"I wanted someone to tell me, 'It's going to be okay.' I just wanted someone to love me, to say, 'It's okay, it's okay,' because I knew it wasn't," he reflected in his living room, head bowed, still ashamed of the pain he caused Carolyne and his family during the lost days of his turbulent life. "I sat in my car—it was Carolyne's car actually—almost in a trance and I was scared. I felt real fear. For many years I'd had a lot of bad thoughts because of the battle for custody of my kids and all the problems I had over my first marriage. I felt everything was against me, and this time I really didn't care if I ended it all because the only time I'd felt truly at peace was when I was in the ring, fighting."

Growing up, Benn had worshipped the eldest of his six brothers, Andy, who earned widespread respect on Ilford's streets for the way he could handle himself in a scrap. "One brave youth against many," Benn described him. In his eyes, Andy, who had been in and out of youth detentions facilities throughout his youth, could do no wrong. His big brother was the one he would snuggle up to at night until he felt safe in the dark. In sibling disputes, which totaled many among seven growing boys, he could be relied upon to side with Nigel.

Benn was only eight when he heard the awful news that his warrior knight had bled to death after falling through a conservatory roof. "Andy won't be coming home again," explained his tearful father, Dickson. Devastated, Benn stepped into his streetfighting brother's shoes and ran with boys twice his age, reveling in the thrill of petty crime. God knows how Dickson tried to make him see sense, but it took the army to instill direction in his life.

But this was no epiphany for a young man with an insatiable appetite for violence. Benn joined his regiment's boxing team and was never beaten in an army bout, but he was never able to confine his fighting to the ring. Nor was he abstemious about much else. When he became a major leaguer in professional boxing, he submitted easily to the dark forces of seduction and orgy.

PHOTO BY MARC Y. MORRIS

Benn (left) tears into arch-rival Chris Eubank during their 1993 rematch that ended in a 12-round draw. Three years earlier, Eubank had stopped Benn in the ninth round following a thrilling contest.

PHOTO BY MARC Y. MORRIS

Benn drills Gerald McClellan with a right hand during their brutal 1995 fight that almost cost McClellan his life. Benn is still troubled about the terrible damage he inflicted, but realizes it could have just as easily been him who was critically injured.

"It's horrible when I look back," he confessed, "not a good time in my life at all. I'd walk into houses with my friends and see a big mound of cocaine on a table, and they'd all be saying, 'Go on, Nige, have some.' I was around naughty people. I remember being taken once to a huge detached house in Surrey's stockbroker belt where they were holding a mass orgy, beautiful naked women everywhere. The temptation was everywhere, drugs, women. Girls were throwing themselves at me like Frisbees, and I just stood there catching them. And that was my life, empty and shallow, chasing some quick, cheap thrill, surrounded by people I classed as friends who aren't around anymore, and that says everything.

"It was Carolyne who first turned to the church to try to change all of this, to pray to the Lord to come into our lives, to give us the humility to open our lives to Him. Every night she read me passages out of the Bible and, though at first I wasn't interested, something was stirring inside and it started to take hold until I began to read the Bible myself and take the lead. The Lord wanted me to take the lead."

Three years ago Benn moved to Majorca and "turned over a completely new leaf." He befriended fellow Christian pastors Kerry and Penny Cook, and for the past year he has held Bible classes in his home, the beginning of his ministry.

"I don't think about fighting anymore," he insisted. "It's gone, out of my life, though the fame I attracted has given me the opportunity to do God's will, to help people transform their lives through my own experiences. My life was changed through Jesus Christ. People want to hear this and the Lord wants me to do many other things. He wants me to open a church. He really has big plans for me. I can feel this in my spirit. I've gone through everything in my life so far in order to reach this point, to be ready to do the Lord's work. If I can be saved, a sinner, so can anyone.

"This is the greatest challenge of my life and I don't think my life will end until I've done what the Lord has called me to do, to preach the gospel, to transform people's lives. This is my destiny and I will see it fulfilled. To please God I will open a church. I believe that's what He wants me to do. Here in Majorca, I know there are people who aren't being spiritually fed. I've helped a young boy who was wrestling with a drug addiction, and now he and his parents are part of our prayer group.

"You see, people are dying inside, overburdened by marriage problems, financial problems, and drugs problems, and they don't know how to escape. Well, I've had a bit of experience of this. I've been through exactly the same. I might not be what some people see in their mind as the pastoral type. I'm not whiter than white. But how am I meant to be? I want people to go to Church and be able to feel something. I want people to be riveted. Jesus wasn't a meek, mild-mannered man. Look how he reacted to the men selling animals for sacrifices inside the temple. He turned over tables and accused them of turning his Father's house into a den of thieves. He went in and smashed up—a bit like me."

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A decade went by before Benn first brought himself to watch the tape. His opponent, Gerald McClellan, now spends his days in a darkened room, sitting in a wheelchair beside a television he can no longer see. One of the most feared fighters of his generation, a concussive puncher who had stopped 29 of his 31 victims, 20 in the opening round, he relies on his sisters, Lisa and Sandra, to provide round-the-clock care. His brain damage has erased much of his memory, but still he tries to convince his infrequent visitors that he is in training for an upcoming bout. "It's so sad, but I

can't blame myself," Benn reflected. "It could have been me."

The fight took place in London and the whole of Britain watched, voyeurism taken to the extreme. Frank Bruno, at ringside, implored Benn to ride out the opening-round storm. Benn was nailed by McClellan's deadly right hand in the opening 30 seconds and fell through the ropes, shocked by McClellan's terrorizing power. He survived because this is what life on the streets of Ilford taught him, but it took trainer Dennie Mancini in his corner to revive his spirit that, when he returned after the one-sided slaughter of the opening round, was crushed. "He's finished, the other guy," Dennie screamed at him. "Now go out there and do to him what he did to you. This is kill or be killed!" It became one of the most vicious ring wars there has ever been.

"It was brutal, there's no other way to describe it," Benn acknowledged. "It was an experience that left me totally drained. I remember when I took a bath in the small hours the next morning, I had to call on some friends to lift me out. I was exhausted."

The beastly exchanges of blows endured for round after round. McClellan, wearing a tattoo of one of his fighting pit bulls, Deuce, on his right shoulder, was in a dogfight and suddenly was struggling. His gumshield kept protruding out of his mouth. He was having trouble breathing. Why were his eyes constantly blinking? He managed to knock Benn to the floor again in round eight, but Benn was far from done, coming "straight back at him with a right hand, left hook combination." It took two more rounds, but right there and then the fight was won and lost. McClellan's vision deteriorated.

In the 10th round, McClellan went down from a combination and stayed on one knee while referee Alfred Azarro tolled to 10. Don King, his promoter, believed he should have gotten up, but soon after walking back to his corner, McClellan slid down the ropes onto the floor and into unconsciousness. Only yards away, Benn was telling a TV interviewer that, "they just brought him over to bash me up." This was pugilism through a prism.

"Gerald McClellan was going to do all sorts to me, that's what his promoter, Don King, kept saying," Benn recalled. "Well, don't think I'm going to be scared. That's not me. Don't think I'm going to fall over. I don't. If you put a man in my way, I'll fight him. I don't care. I fear nobody."

Fate brought these two blood brothers together one last time. As Peter Sutcliffe, the neurosurgeon in the Royal London Hospital, prepared for the operation that would remove a blood clot from McClellan's brain and save his life, Benn, who was hospitalized himself, was wheeled into the cubicle adjacent to his stricken foe. He walked over, tenderly lifted the right hand that had almost decapitated him, and kissed it. "Sorry," he said. And sorry he remains.

"It's a hard thing to talk about. Words won't change a thing. What can you really say?" he sighed under the setting Spanish sun. "It's not something I can cheer about, that win, because he's his mother's son. But this is boxing. Not that I ever intended for that to happen. No, never. It's truly sad. It's not really an experience I want to talk about."

How could it be? He had just picked up his daughter, Sade, from the airport, Sade who had asked him in the days after the fight one simple question.

"Do you know what I really, really want, Daddy," she said, "more than anything?"

"What do you want, darling?" Benn replied.

"I want you to stop fighting. That's all I want."

***

He was back in the war zone recently, though only for TV, "a celebrity Special Air Service-style reality show (the SAS is a British Army unit specializing in clandestine operations) and it was hard, horribly hard." Steve Collins, the Celtic Warrior who beat Benn in each of his last two fights, endured it with him, a series of challenges that would have found weakness in any 41-year-old man. But, where it matters most, Benn is no longer weak.

"We were being ambushed by these SAS men, six of them, who then kept us up all night, interrogating us," he reflected. "They put us in ice water, everything. Now, I keep myself in shape, but when all the filming was done and they announced a big party to celebrate, I headed straight for my bed and went to sleep. I was exhausted.

"But that doesn't matter to me anymore. Why doesn't it matter? Because I have better things to do. What is it that Matthew wrote? 'The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send laborers into his harvest.' I think I know what I need to be doing." ■

Brian Doogan is THE RING's European correspondent.

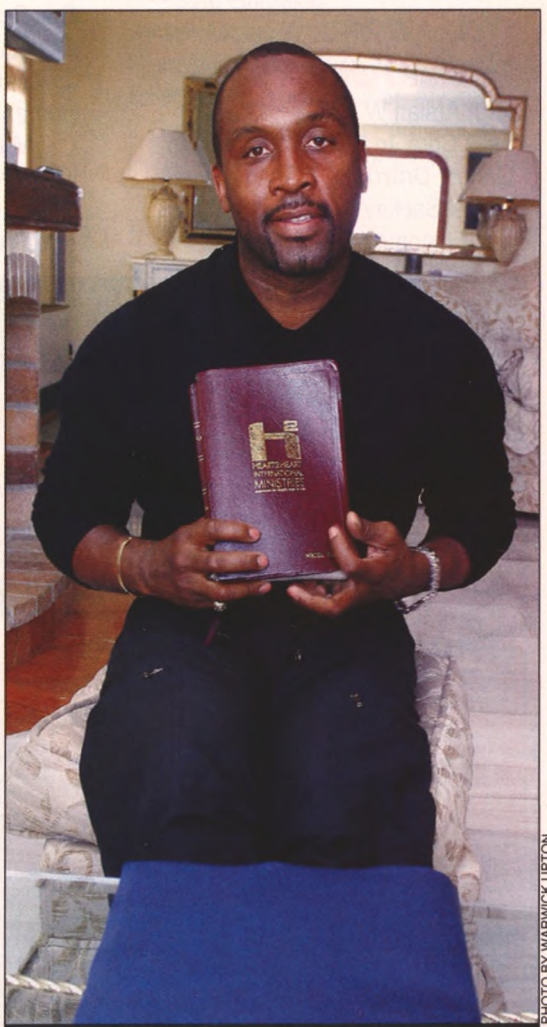


PHOTO BY WARWICK UPTON

Benn holds the Bible that has finally helped him find peace of mind after many years of turbulence and unhappiness. Finally shed of his demons, the former boxing bad boy is now intent on helping others.

Summary

Heavyweights

Oleg Maskaev W 12 Sinan Samil Sam
David Tua W 10 Cisse Salif
Zuri Lawrence W 10 Jameel McCline
Robert Hawkins W 10 Robert Wiggins
John Chapman KO 1 Ron Johnson
Rafael Butler KO 1 Andrew Jackson
Manuel Alberto Pucheta KO 5
Cesar Gustavo Acevedo
Tye Fields KO 2 Bruce Seldon
Luciano Zolyone KO 2
Jose Carlos Da Silva
Patrice L'Heureux KO 1 Josh Gutcher
Amosa Zinck KO 3 Mosese Kavika
Paolo Ferrara W 10 Alessandro Guni

Cruiserweights

Firat Arslan W 12 Carlos Cruzat
Felix Cora Jr. KO 9 Arthur Williams
Grigory Drozd KO 7 Shane Swartz
Daniel Sackey W 6
Ehinomen Ehikhamenor
Ramiro Reduncindo KO 8 Daniel Cota
Paolo Ferrara W 10 Alessandro Guni

Light Heavyweights

Zsolt Erdei KO 12 Mehdi Sahnoune
Eric Harding W 10 Daniel Judah
Ladislav Kutil W 12 Giulian Ilie
Hector Velazco KO 3
Hugo Ricardo Rodriguez
Pita Domoni KO 1 Sefanaia Vakacegu
Kali Jacobus W 12 Sakeasi Dakua

Super Middleweights

Jeff Lacy KO 2 Scott Pemberton
(*Retains IBF title*)
Otis Grant W 10 Donnell Wiggins
Allan Green KO 1 Jaidon Codrington
Jozsef Nagy W 12 Danny Thornton
Roman Shkarupa W 10
Mukadi Manda
Konni Konrad W 10 Jamie Hearn
Nestor Casanova KO 9
Gustavo Kapusi
Mario Veit W 8 Gusmyl Perdomo
Toshihiko Itagaki KO 1
Fedpayak Saktawee
Yusaf Mack KO 6 Christian Cruz

Middleweights

Sebastian Sylvester W 12
Lorenzo Di Giacomo
Javier Castillejo W 8 Presente Brito
John Duddy KO 4 Bryon Mackie
Hussein Bayram W 10
Sabou Ballogou
John Humphrey W 10 Gokhan Kazaz
Hector Camacho Jr. W 8
Nelson Estupinan
Edison Miranda KO 3 Sherwin Davis
Willie Gibbs W 10 Marcos Primera
Vinnie Baldassara W 10 Craig Lynch

Junior Middleweights

Sebastian Lujan KO 3 Ariel Chaves
Vanes Martirosyan KO 5
Abdias Castillo

PHOTO BY FRIEDEMANN VOGEL/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

Heavyweight Oleg Maskaev rams a right into Sinan Samil Sam

Sechew Powell W 10
Archak Ter-Meliksetian
Yuri Foreman W 10 Troy Lowry
Alfonso Sanchez KO 1 Steve Martinez
Vernon Forrest KO 10 Elco Garcia
Joshua Clottey W 10 Marlon Thomas
Roman Dzuman W 10 Jurijs Boreiko
Victor Puiu W 10 Adam Green
Ante Bilic KO 6 Laszlo Buranyi
Guillermo Javier Saputo W 10
Ruben Dario Oliva
Daniel Geale KO 8 Garry Comer
Walter Wright KO 8 Kemal Kolenovic
Marco Schulze KO 11
Gotthard Hinteregger
Attila Kovacs KO 7 Mamadou Thiam
Jimmy Colas W 10 Alexander Sipos

Welterweights

Chris Smith KO 5 Tomas Barrientes
Michael Jennings W 12
Bradley Pryce
Pakphum Chengphonak W 12
Dondon Sultan
Mario Jose Ramos W 10
Cosme Rivera
Daigoro Yamamoto KO 7
Dindo Castanares
Luis Fuente KO 7 Jesus Cruz

Junior Welterweights

Juan Lazcano KO 9
Courtney Burton
Junior Witter W 12 Colin Lynes
Opeti Tagi W 12 Epeli Toutou
Juan Carlos Rodriguez KO 9
Wilfredo Negron
Lance Gostelow KO 5
Kongthawat Singwangcha
Martin Antonio Coggi KO 2
Angel German Ilundain
Michele Di Rocco W 10
Massimo Bertozzi
Jung Bum Kim KO 1
Tsukasa Kashiwagi
Pablo Oliveto KO 2
Fabian Alfredo Ruiz

Lightweights

Juan Carlos Diaz Melero KO 10
Stefano Zoff
Amir Khan KO 3 Steve Gethin
Ha-na Kim KO 1 Tae Sun Kim
David Diaz KO 3 Juan Polo Perez
Roberto Valenzuela KO 2
Emidgio Gastelum
Sirimongkol Singwangcha KO 7
Wu Xiao Song
Chikashi Inada KO 4 Yong Bum Lee
Fernando Montilla KO 4
Dexter Delada
Shunsuke Ito KO 10 Kazuki Kubota

Junior Lightweights

Suttisak Samaksaman W 12
Jun Paderna
Kevin Kelley KO 4 Sandro Marcos
Gi Hoon Kim KO 6 Wu Xiao Song
Billy Corcoran KO 4 Roy Rutherford
Takashi Miura KO 4
Wanhin Chuwatana
Giovanni Andrade W 10
Jose Claudio Da Silva

Featherweights

Scott Harrison W 12 Nedal Hussein
Tim Austin KO 3 Julio Coronell
Saohin Srithai Condo KO 11
Almaz Assanov
Agnaldo Nunes W 10
Adalberto Borquez
Mario Santiago KO 5 Cornelius Lock
Andrey Isaev KO 12 Rocky Dean
Ray Mukhlis KO 9 Orlando Sitohang
Takeshi Mitsuyama KO 7
Weerachai Chuwatana
Masaki Miya KO 5 Taka Bando

Junior Featherweights

Veeraphol Sahaprom KO 4
Roger Galicia
Jun Toriumi KO 6 Asahi Takano
Steve Molitor KO 3
Jorge Antonio Paredes
Fahsan 3K Battery KO 2
Noel Sungahid
Daniel Ponce De Leon W 12
Sod Looknongyangtoy
Diego Morales KO 1 Len Martinez
Tomas Villa KO 8
Cuauhtemoc Vargas
Saenghiran Lookbanyai KO 6
Julius Tarona
Yuya Miyagi W 10 Yoshimasa Shibata
Akifumi Shimoda W 10
Tsutomu Odajima
Juan Ruiz W 12 Priest Smalls

Bantamweights

Jhonny Gonzalez KO 7
Ratanachai Sor Vorapin
Rafael Marquez KO 4 Silence Mabuza
Michael Domingo W 12 Rolly Lunas
Luis Maldonado W 10 Tomas Rojas
Chatchai Sasakul W 8
Nathan Barcelona
Kohei Kono KO 2
Petchdam Sithsaithong
Tabtimdaeng Na Rachawat KO 3
Allan Fuentes
Masaki Kawabata KO 5
Pramote Sor Vorapin

Junior Bantamweights

Fernando Montiel W 12
Pramuansak Posuwan
Rosendo Alvarez W 10
Julio Grimaldo
Robert Allanic W 10 Roy Doliguez
Giyou ng Kim W 10 Tsubasa Maedo
Ezequiel Aguirre W 8 Juan Álvarez
Z Gorres KO 3 Wisanu Pornobnum
Pablo Montenegro D 8 Erick Aguilera

Flyweights

Yoppie Benu D 12 Steven Mabuat
Panomroonglek Kratingdaenggym
KO 8 Liu Yong Jun
Gilberto Keb Baas W 10 Juan Gamez
Juan Centeno W 10 Oscar Murillo
Jojo Bardon KO 3 Rolly Mandahinog

Junior Flyweights

Juan Palacios KO 3 Christian Gomez
Hugo Cazares KO 6
Kaichon Sor Vorapin
Nobuaki Masuda W 10
Yukio Wadamine
Miguel Villanueva KO 4
David Torres
Rodel Quilaton KO 2 Jerry Duaso
Jerry Pahayahay Tech. Win 6
Chris Dujali
Juhee Kim W 10 Marianne Chubirka

Strawweights

Omar Soto W 12 Gerardo Verde
Oleydong Sithsamerchai KO 6
Lito Sisnorio
Satoshi Kogumazaka W 10
Junichiro Kaneda
Teruo Misawa W 10 Makoto Suzuki

Jeff Lacy KO 2 Scott Pemberton

Stateline, Nevada: What on paper looked to be a sure-fire slugfest between two of the super middleweight division's most exciting hitters turned out instead to be a one-sided beating in favor of IBF titlist Lacy, who made it an early night for "The Sandman." After dropping his 38-year-old opponent midway through the second round, the 28-year-old Lacy turned the lights out on Pemberton with a devastating right hand in front of 1,569 fans at Caesars Tahoe. Referee Vic Drakulich (USA) didn't bother with a count as the stunned Pemberton lay on his side, the fight ending at 2:59 of round two.

Lacy, 168, St. Petersburg, Florida, did everything right for this fight, arriving at Lake Tahoe five weeks early to acclimate himself to the 6,200-foot altitude as well as taking seriously the hitherto dangerous Pemberton, who at 6'2" had a five-inch height advantage. It would've been easy for Lacy, making his fourth defense of the vacant strap he won October 2, 2004, to lose focus. After all, he was supposed to be facing WBO boss Joe Calzaghe in a bout for the vacant RING championship, but the Welshman fell out with a broken hand following his September 10 victory over Evans Ashira.

No such luck for Pemberton, who showed up only one week prior to the event under new trainer John Scully. Pemberton, 168, New Bedford, Massachusetts, tried to use his height and 78-inch reach to his advantage by sticking and moving early, but the heavy-handed Lacy was able to land one-twos and right hands throughout the first round.

Pemberton landed a nice three-punch combination midway through the second, but Lacy trumped the effort with three vicious lefts to the body and followed with a screaming overhand right to put Pemberton down for a nine-count.

Lacy quickly overwhelmed the gutsy Pemberton, who bent at the waist, bobbing and weaving while trying to avoid getting tagged. Pemberton fired a hard right, but Lacy walked through it and delivered his own crushing right, which knocked a ball of Pemberton's saliva several feet out of the ring and sent his foe down to the canvas.

"Lacy's one of the hardest punchers I've faced," said Pemberton in a vast understatement. He took home a career-high $150,000, but dropped to 29-4-1 (24).

Known as "Left Hook," Lacy has also done a nice job of integrating an effective jab and crushing right hand into his repertoire.

"Everyone looks for the left hook," said Lacy, "so I have to go back to the gym and on work on something more devastating."

Lacy, 21-0 (17) with 1 no-contest, pulled in $200,000 for his six destructive minutes of work, but said he is looking for much bigger paydays.

"I want the big names in 2006," he said. "I'm a young champion. I need to stay busy and visible on Showtime. If Calzaghe doesn't step up, I want Antonio Tarver."

Gary Shaw, Lacy's promoter, said world light heavyweight champion Tarver would probably duck Lacy, but that he was optimistic he could match Lacy with Calzaghe in Wales in February or March.

Television: **Showtime**
Promoter: **Gary Shaw Productions**
(11-5-05)
Mike Houser

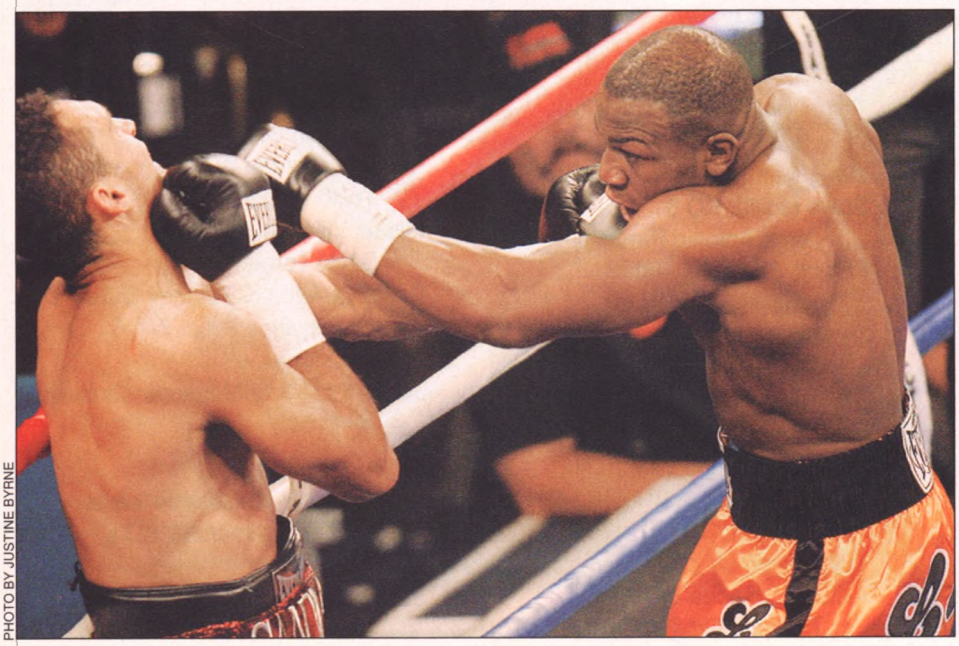


PHOTO BY JUSTINE BYRNE

Lacy was all over Pemberton for a second-round TKO

Rafael Marquez KO 4 Silence Mabuza

Stateline, Nevada: If there's a better 118-pound fighter in the world today, he's going to have to prove it against Marquez, who arguably turned in his most impressive performance to date in turning back the challenge of Mabuza. The 30-year-old Marquez, 118, Mexico City, scored a first-round knockdown and lumped up and sliced open the 29-year-old Mabuza, 118, Johannesburg, South Africa, on the way to a fourth-round TKO in front of 1,569 fans at Caesars Tahoe.

On the advice of ringside physician Steven Brown, referee Norm Budden (USA) called it off at 2:08 of the fourth round because of a

gaping wound over Mabuza's right eye. At the time of the stoppage Marquez, 35-3 (31), was sweeping the rounds on the cards of all three judges—Denny Nelson (USA), Adelaide Byrd (USA), and Burt Clements (USA). It was the sixth defense for IBF bantamweight titlist Marquez, who took the belt from Tim Austin via eight-round TKO on February 15, 2003.

The result was only mildly controversial because of the presence of instant replay, which showed a third-round clash of heads, but not conclusive evidence that it caused the gash. After reviewing the tape two days later, Budden said Showtime reporter Jim Gray showed him tape of the butt. The replay showed an obvious butt (which Budden didn't see originally), but none of the action that led up to or following it. Nevada State Athletic Commission Executive Director Marc Ratner said a Marquez punch opened up a small cut first, which was later enlarged with a butt, so the bout was stopped and ruled a TKO instead of a no-contest.

The issue shouldn't detract from the performance of Marquez, who landed several rib-rattling left hooks early in the first round. A left to the head put Mabuza, 18-1 (15), down for a four-count with just over 30 seconds remaining in the round, and the South African withstood a Marquez barrage to make it to the bell.

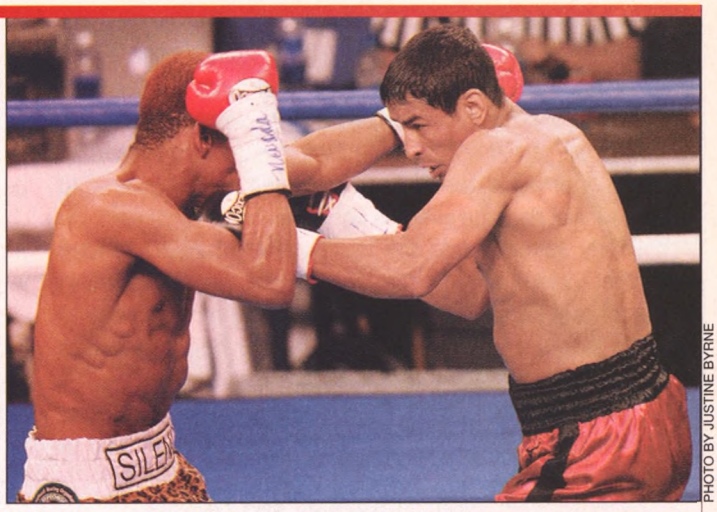


PHOTO BY JUSTINE BYRNE

Savvy Marquez slips a left inside of Mabuza's guard

[The Ring Fighter of the Month] Presented by EVERLAST

Jhonny Gonzalez

The way he spells his first name isn't the only thing that sets Jhonny Gonzalez apart. His activity level is also quite atypical in the modern fight game. Gonzalez fought five times in 2005. He fought six times in 2004. And most importantly for a fighter who began his career 0-2 and later found himself a mediocre 14-4, Gonzalez won all 11 of those fights, with his most recent one being the most meaningful and impressive.

If there was any doubt over whether Gonzalez was ready to be ranked among the elite at bantamweight, that doubt was erased with his 17th consecutive win, a seven-round destruction of streaking veteran Ratanachai Vorapin that stole the show on the four-fight HBO Latino "Mexico vs. Thailand" card. Gonzalez' uppercut was a thing of beauty, dropping the unsuspecting Ratanachai twice in the third round. His left hook was also fairly devastating, accounting for a violent knockdown in the sixth. In the end, the tough Thai, a fighter who had only been stopped once in 73 previous fights, barely made it halfway through the scheduled 12-rounder, and Gonzalez claimed by far the biggest victory of his career.

A few years ago, it was not uncommon for journalists to misspell Gonzalez' name. But there's no excuse anymore. We've had reason to type it quite a bit in 2004 and 2005, and it looks like we're going to be typing it even more in the months and years to come.

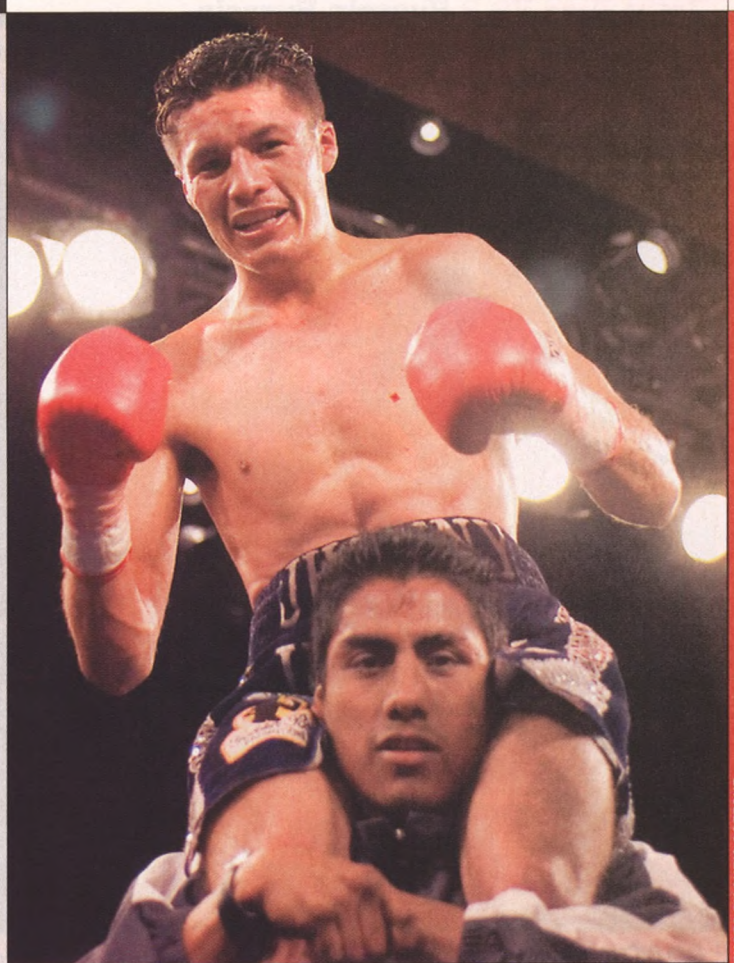


PHOTO BY CHRIS COZZONE

After absorbing another four-punch combination in the second, the resilient Mabuza dished out three left hooks of his own to end the session. Marquez complemented his powershots with a stiff left jab in the third. A hard right opened up a cut under Mabuza's left eye, and a left hook appeared to do the initial damage over the right eye.

Thirty seconds into the fourth, after Marquez landed another vicious hook to the injured right eye, Budden had Brown check out the cut. Mabuza was given the okay to continue, but it wasn't long before the wound had widened and the fight was stopped.

"I was afraid his vision was being affected and I was worried [the cut] would expose the nerve," Brown said of his decision.

Mabuza, who collected $37,500, said he wanted a rematch. Marquez took home $112,500 and said he'd consider the request.

If Marquez doesn't grant the rematch to Mabuza or square off in a unification bout with WBA strapholder Wladimir Sidorenko, an attractive match with WBC super bantamweight kingpin Oscar Larios could be next.

Television: **Showtime**
Promoter: **Gary Shaw Productions**
(11-5-05)
Mike Houser

Jorge Arce KO 2 Hussein Hussein

Las Vegas, Nevada: This flyweight rematch was expected to be a Fight of the Year candidate, just like their first encounter seven months earlier. But whereas that was a bloody, 10-round, back-and-forth war, this was a one-sided two-round destruction, as Arce put Hussein on the canvas twice and won by TKO in the second round in the co-feature to Jose Luis Castillo-Diego Corrales II.

"I don't know about these hands. As soon as I hit someone with them, they go down," Arce remarked after his impressive display of power.

Hussein, 112, Sydney, Australia, and Arce, 111, Los Mochis, Mexico, hinted early on at an action fight similar to their first bout. Hussein tried to use his left jab to keep former junior flyweight titlist Arce at a distance, but it only worked for about 30 seconds before "El Travieso," who was marching forward and moving his head well, unloaded with powerful left hooks to Hussein's body. The 15,000-plus fans at the Thomas and Mack Center were on their feet as Hussein and Arce traded blows. Suddenly, halfway through the first round, Hussein, 30, found himself on the canvas courtesy of a straight right hand to the head from Arce, 26.

In their first meeting, Hussein used his footwork when pinned on the ropes to spin away and get out of trouble, but this time Arce kept him on the ropes and did plenty of damage. At the start of the second round, Arce intensified his attack and landed left and right hooks to Hussein's body, and you could see that the Mexican was setting Hussein up for his left hook to the head.

Late in round two, Arce landed a left hook to Hussein's chin and put him down again. He wasn't badly hurt as he rose, but just as in their first fight, Hussein's trainer, Jeff Fenech, stepped up and told the referee, Kenny Bayless (USA), that his fighter had taken enough. Hussein, 28-3 (21), was disappointed, but the fight was over at 2:50 of round two.

"I've never had a fighter who was hurt bad, and I don't want one," Fenech said in defending what many viewed as a premature surrender.

Arce, 41-3-1 (31), announced, "I am ready for anyone at 112 pounds," and went on to call out highly regarded Rosendo Alvarez.

Television: **Showtime Pay-Per-View**
Promoters: **Top Rank, Gary Shaw Productions**
(10-8-05)
Wayne McCullough

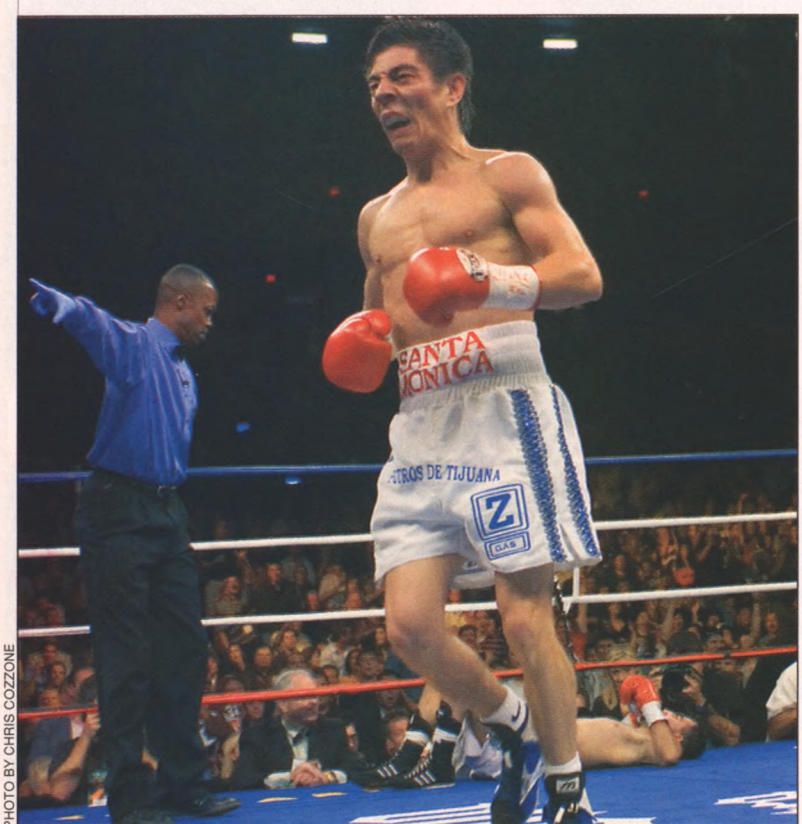


PHOTO BY CHRIS COZZONE

Arce flattens Hussein in rematch

Bobby Pacquiao W 10 Carlos Hernandez

Las Vegas, Nevada: Former junior lightweight titlist Hernandez is never in a bad fight. But he is sometimes in fights that end badly. Facing Manny Pacquiao's younger brother on the Castillo-Corrales II undercard, Hernandez lost a 10-round split decision that was as unpopular as any verdict handed down by boxing judges this year.

"I thank God no one was hurt," Hernandez said, "but I think I was robbed. The people know who the winner was. The people know it was me."

The opening round was close as Pacquiao, 130, General Santos City, Philippines, moved around the ring trying to counterpunch the more aggressive Hernandez, 132, West Covina, California. Both fighters had success in the round, with Hernandez landing a right hand to Pacquiao's head before Pacquiao threw a right hand-left hook combination back at him.

Pacquiao was under pressure in the next round, but he managed to land a clean left to his opponent's chin, sending Hernandez to the canvas for a flash knockdown. Just as he got to his feet, the round ended.

Now trailing, probably by three points, Hernandez, 34, took over in the third, rocking Pacquiao, 24, with a right hand to the chin. From the third through the eighth, Hernandez controlled the fight and dictated the pace. He made Pacquiao fight at close range, which was not where the Filipino wanted to be. In round four, Hernandez almost doubled Pacquiao over with a bodyshot.

PHOTO BY DONALD MIRALLE/GETTY IMAGES

Pacquiao cracks Hernandez with a right

Hernandez, 41-6-1 (24), was hurting Pacquiao, 26-11-3 (11), in the middle rounds with short left hooks to the body, and it was clear that Pacquiao was fading. In round nine, Pacquiao began to stage a comeback, stepping up the pace and landing solid right and left hooks to Hernandez' chin. Hernandez was the busier of the two fighters in the last round, but they were both landing scoring punches.

When Pacquiao was announced as the winner by split decision, boos were heard all over the Thomas and Mack Center. Duane Ford (USA) saw the bout 95-93, and Chuck Giampa (USA) scored it 95-94, both for Pacquiao. Robert Hoyle (USA) had it 97-92 for Hernandez. THE RING scored it 96-93 for Hernandez.

Referee: **Toby Gibson** (USA).
Television: **Showtime Pay-Per-View**
Promoters: **Top Rank, Gary Shaw Productions**
(10-8-05)
Wayne McCullough

Pongsaklek Wonjongkam Tech. Win 7 Daisuke Naito

Tokyo, Japan: Japanese challenger Naito did not succeed in dethroning longtime WBC flyweight titleholder Pongsaklek. But he did succeed dramatically in improving upon his previous result against the Thailander, when he was knocked out in just 34 seconds.

This rematch lasted until 2:38 of the seventh round, when it was stopped due to a bad cut suffered by Naito. The fight went to the scorecards, where all three American judges—Gale Van Hoy, Gary Ritter, and Ray Hawkins—gave Pongsaklek the technical decision by identical scores of 68-64, recognizing the beltholder's sharp combinations and tight defense.

Pongsaklek, 112, making his 12th defense, began very cautiously and coped with the aggressiveness of the tricky Japanese challenger by landing short counters. Pongsaklek was in command in the second, but he lost a point in accordance with WBC rules when an accidental head-

PHOTO BY KAZUHIRO NOGI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Wongjongkam batters Naito into bloody defeat

butt caused a bloody gash on Naito's face.

In the third, the 29-year-old southpaw titlist connected with many left-right combos while the 31-year-old Naito, 112, occasionally lost his balance after swinging wildly. The Thailander seemed to dominate the fourth too, but Naito, 27-2-2 (19), took the fifth, as he caught his opponent with looping hooks and distracted him with his unorthodox footwork. Pongsaklek took back the initiative by landing crisp punches to the bloodied challenger in the sixth and seventh.

Midway through the seventh, Mexican referee Lupe Garcia had Naito's worsening gash examined by the ring physician. The fight continued for another minute or so, until the third man again called the doctor, who finally advised him to stop the affair.

Pongsaklek, 58-2 (31), definitely didn't fight his best, and may have been a little too overconfident due to his quick win over Naito in 2002. Still, he got the win, and discussions of a major fight against "interim" titlist Jorge Arce followed the victory.

Promoter: **Miyata Promotions**
(10-10-05)
Joe Koizumi

Jhonny Gonzalez KO 7
Ratanachai Vorapin

Tohono O'odham Nation, Arizona: Gonzalez won big on the Mexico versus Thailand "World Cup" card at Desert Diamond Casino, outside Tucson. Streaking bantamweight Gonzalez entered this contest with unanswered questions about full potential or missed opportunities, but proved he had plenty of game when the chips were down. Gonzalez came through with by far his sharpest performance for a spectacular victory when it counted most.

Ratanachai, 118, Korat, Thailand, was the most experienced fighter of the highly qualified Thai contingent, but this being his 74th pro fight, that mileage makes him a very old 28. The sometimes-reckless Gonzalez, 116¾, Mexico City, fought a very composed battle, and used his reach to maximum effect, while also rumbling well with uppercuts inside. Ratanachai charged with short hooks from all directions, but Gonzalez was disciplined and used fine short left uppercuts to dump Ratanachai twice in the third round.

Ratanachai paid the price for coming in, but he had his moments before Gonzalez dropped him in a bloody heap at the bell ending round six. Still, Ratanachai gestured for more. Gonzalez pounced immediately after the minute off, and ref Robert Byrd (USA) stepped in before any more damage was done, at 22 seconds of the seventh.

It was a tough night all around for Ratanachai, 65-9 (42), who saw his younger brother, Kaichon, stopped in a shootout against Hugo Cazares earlier in the evening.

Gonzalez, 31-4 (27), dedicated the bittersweet victory to a beloved uncle who reportedly committed suicide a week before the fight.

"[Ratanachai] hurt me a couple times, but I was able to withstand the pain," said Gonzalez. "I knew he'd keep getting up because he's a champion, but I felt very strong. There's a weight off my shoulders. I think my uncle is happy."

Television: **HBO Latino**
Promoter: **Golden Boy Promotions**
(10-29-05)
Phil Woolever

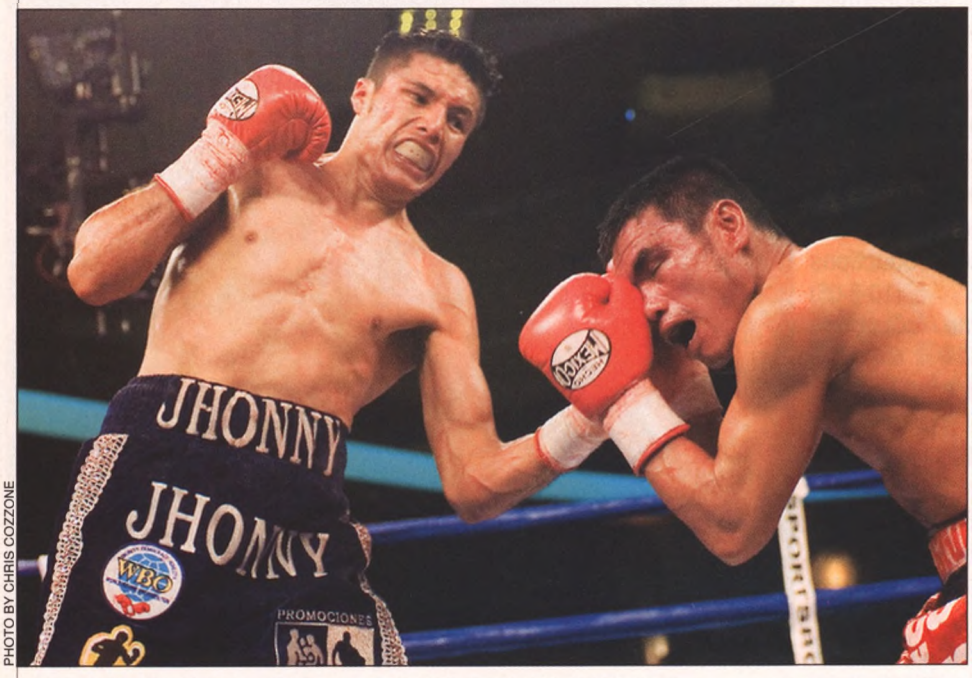


PHOTO BY CHRIS COZZONE

Gonzalez connects with an uppercut en route to impressive kayo of Vorapin

Daniel Ponce De Leon W 12
Sod Looknongyangtoy

Tohono O'odham Nation, Arizona: Even at 27-1 (25), Ponce De Leon is still very much a work in progress. How much progress he needed before being considered well-rounded enough to defeat elite fighters was still a big question coming into his fight with the undefeated Thailander Sod, who at least qualifies as a credible fighter, if not an elite one. More than 2,000 faithful attended the "World Cup" show at Desert Diamond Casino, and Ponce De Leon, 121, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico, seized the opportunity by coming off the canvas to win a close unanimous decision in this battle of southpaws.

Despite getting dumped on his butt by a quick right hook in the second frame, Ponce De Leon remained determined and used his stick to pile up points, attempting to box more than he has in the past. Meanwhile, Sod, 121½, Srithep, Thailand, gave

PHOTO BY CHRIS COZZONE

Ponce De Leon comes over the top with a left against Looknongyangtoy

Ponce De Leon fits with side-to-side movement and alternating leads. If the visiting Thai, now 25-1 (10), had more pop, the result may have been different.

However, Ponce De Leon did keep steady pressure on and proved he can box 12 hard rounds. He certainly proved it to the American judges, as Raul Caiz Jr. and Chris Wilson agreed at 115-112, and Howard Richey had it 118-109. Many in the crowd jeered the decision, though most ringside press polled favored Ponce De Leon. THE RING saw it a 114-114 draw.

"I cannot accept this decision," said Sod, 28.

"This is my ultimate redemption day," reflected Ponce De Leon, 25. "My plan was to build up points. I won for my whole country."

Ponce De Leon's raw talent carries both good and bad news. He's learned from mistakes that led him to his first defeat, to Celestino Caballero last February, and he's strong enough to give anyone trouble with his consistent power. The bad news is he has defensive flaws—as in no defense at all. If the cliche about the best protection being good offense has any truth, it's a half-full, half-empty spit bucket type question. And as he continues to square off with tough opposition like this, we'll get more answers.

Referee: **Dr. Lou Moret** (USA).
Television: **HBO Latino**
Promoter: **Golden Boy Promotions**
(10-29-05)

Phil Woolever

Fernando Montiel W 12 Pramuansak Posawan

Tohono O'odham Nation, Arizona: Talk about early Halloween horrors. Some fans arrived in costume, but no packaged guise matched the gruesome special effects to be seen inside the strands. In the final bout of a card that featured plenty of gore and guts, Pramuansak was transformed into the best, or should we say worst, costume in the Desert Diamond Casino. His face became a distorted mask of pain under Montiel's tentative but effective glove work, but he still made the Mexican work hard for his unanimous decision win.

The 36-year-old Pramuansak, 29-1-1 (17), 115, Mahasalakam, Thailand, showed that his regionally built undefeated record coming in was worthy of a step up to world-class competition. His offbeat rhythm of feints kept the well-regarded Montiel, 32-1-1 (24), 115, Los Mochis, Mexico, from establishing control, and many of the rounds were difficult to score.

"Cochulito" Montiel had a spreading blood blister sprout beneath his right eye by the third round, but it seemed ref Raul

PHOTO BY CHRIS COZZONE

Montiel (left) overcame some rough moments to outpoint Posuwan

Caiz Sr. (USA) had the vision problems. He scored a knockdown against Montiel in the eighth that replays showed landed plenty low, and then ruled one against Pramuansak in the 12th after a slip without visible contact. Luckily, neither call was crucial, and Caiz handled most of the awkward action properly.

Midway through, an upset looked quite possible as Pramuansak snapped in jabs from unusual angles. Montiel, 26, looked frustrated as stingers overcame his usually evasive defense, but his speed kept him away from most follow-ups.

More and more, Montiel got in the last punch. By the eighth frame, he was darting in well with jarring combinations, and the side of Pramuansak's right eye began to balloon. It gradually became quite a severe and grotesque injury.

Judges Rocky Burke and Chris Wilson scored it 114-112, and Howard Richey had it 115-112. THE RING saw it 117-114 for Montiel, tabbing a few even rounds.

"I'd like to stay at this weight and fight Martin Castillo," challenged Montiel. "I hope nobody runs from me."

Television: **HBO Latino**
Promoter: **Golden Boy Promotions**
(10-29-05)
Phil Woolever

Scott Harrison W 12 Nedal Hussein

Glasgow, Scotland: With British boxing's new sensation, Amir Khan, appearing on the undercard, stopping Steve Gethin in conclusive style in the third fight of his fledgling career, Harrison, 126, Cambuslang, Scotland, came to the ring with a 5,000-strong capacity crowd of his countrymen cheering him to the rafters and used their strength and his own to overpower Hussein, 125½, Sydney, Australia, at the Braehead Arena. Having briefly lost the WBO featherweight title to Manuel Medina, whom he won it back from in November 2003, this was the sixth defense of his second tenure as WBO beltholder after emerging as a force in this division by beating Julio Pablo Chacon for the title in October 2002.

Since that night, Harrison's career has oscillated between ruthlessly commanding and surprisingly unconvincing, one of the factors behind this inconsistency in performance undoubtedly his arduous challenge before each fight to make weight. The 28-year-old is a freakishly big featherweight and the task of getting down to 126 pounds is increasingly a problem, despite his own view to the contrary.

"If Scott wants to continue fighting at featherweight, I will respect that," said his manager, Frank Maloney, who has advocated a move to junior lightweight. "We all have an opinion and I expressed mine."

Hussein's opinion was that he could stop Harrison in six rounds, but having stepped up from junior featherweight, where his lone losses came against Manny Pacquiao and Oscar Larios, he was never likely to carry with him the necessary dynamite in his fists to carry out this threat. He seemed to be more in survival than destructive mode in the opening round, showing his left hook about midway through but little else behind it as Harrison, in his methodical way, took the session without any alarm. But the Australian found his range in the second, landing a solid right uppercut on the inside and following up with a straight right to Harrison's head and a hard hook to the body. In the third, he had even greater success with the uppercut, landing one on Harrison's chin that forced the Scot to cling on in a clinch. But Harrison walked his man down in the fourth, pushing him to the ropes and landing flurries of blows including a left hook that clearly troubled Hussein.

The 27-year-old challenger was in further trouble in the fifth, floored by what appeared at first glance to be a right hand followed by a jab, but the blows from Harrison, TV replays showed, were glancing shots at best. Nevertheless, Hussein, 39-3 (25), looked discouraged as he rose and took the eight-

PHOTO BY JOHN GICHIGI/GETTY IMAGES

Harrison rips Hussein with a right

count from referee Paul Thomas (England). Harrison threw a wild torrent of blows in a failed attempt to stop his opponent and remained in charge in the sixth. Hussein looked incapable of utilizing the lateral movement that might have caused Harrison problems, especially if he had let his hands go in quick bursts. Perhaps he was too concerned with self-preservation.

The jab might have swung the fight Hussein's way had he thrown it more frequently when the pace of the fight dropped after the sixth round. Harrison, 25-2-2 (14), was even perched on the ropes at one point, but the Australian could not take advantage, not even when he landed a short right in the 10th that caught Harrison's attention.

The Aussie challenger needed two big rounds in an effort to stop Harrison, and he came up with one in the 11th, landing a succession of heavy punches on Harrison's head. But the Scot is a real competitor, full of venom, and he landed a solid left hook in the 12th that forced Hussein to back down.

All three judges scored it for Harrison: Roy Francis (England) and Manuel Palomo (Spain) both had it 116-111, while Andre Van Grootenbruel (Belgium) saw it 117-111. THE RING also scored for Harrison, 116-111.

"I will decide when I move up to super featherweight, not anyone else, not Frank Warren (Harrison's promoter) or Frank Maloney," said Harrison, who could face Juan Guzman of the Dominican Republic next. "It's my body and I will know myself when I am no longer capable of making the featherweight limit."

Promoter: **Sports Network**
(11-5-05)
Brian Doogan

PHOTO BY ED MULHOLLAND

Ouma get back on the winning track versus Cuevas

Kassim Ouma KO 4 Freddie Cuevas

Atlantic City, New Jersey: In a get-well fight for former junior middleweight titlist Ouma, fresh off his title-dropping upset loss to Roman Karmazin three months earlier, "The Dream" got *very* well, disposing of journeyman Cuevas in impressively quick and dominant fashion at the Borgata Hotel & Spa. Though the 36-year-old Cuevas wasn't expected to provide much resistance, he also wasn't expected to go quite so easily, considering that he'd never been stopped and went the full 12 rounds with future middleweight champion Jermain Taylor two years earlier. But Ouma scored knockdowns in both the first and fourth rounds and had Cuevas so badly outgunned that the Chicagoan's corner stopped the fight after the fourth round ended.

From the opening bell, southpaw Ouma, 154½, West Palm Beach, Florida, via Uganda, was scoring easily with crisp lefts and rights, and he hurt Cuevas, 155, with a straight left-right hook combination midway through the round. Moments later, a counter right hook to the chin deposited Cuevas on the canvas, but he easily beat referee Earl Morton's count and managed, with difficulty, to survive the round.

Ouma, 26, remained in control throughout rounds two and three, though he didn't land anything as effective as the telling shots from the opening round. In the fourth, however, Cuevas, 25-8-1 (17), found himself in serious trouble once again. Ouma first dropped him in the corner with a four-punch combination, then punctuated the round with a three-punch combination that split Cuevas' guard and rocked him visibly. Cuevas' people had seen enough, and when their bloodied fighter staggered back to his corner after the round, they wisely surrendered.

With the win, Ouma, 22-2-1 (14) with 1 no-contest, takes a step toward a possible revenge match with Karmazin, though it appears he'll have to wait to see if Karmazin passes a tough January test against Daniel Santos first.

Television: **HBO Latino**
Promoters: **Golden Boy Promotions, Peltz Boxing**
(10-13-05)

Zsolt Erdei KO 12 Mehdi Sahnoune

Halle, Germany: Every drop of resistance in his body, every last vestige of productive energy and commitment, went into this heroic effort by Erdei, 174, Budapest, Hungary, who managed to stave off the debilitating effects of a rib injury as well as the methodical and damaging advances of Sahnoune, 173, Marseilles, France, to win in a *Rocky*-style finish and retain the WBO light heavyweight title at the Brandberge Arena. It was Erdei's fourth defense of a belt he took off Julio Gonzalez almost two years ago and, by a distance, the toughest fight of his life.

Originally scheduled for July, the bout had to be postponed when Erdei, a former world amateur champion and an Olympic bronze medalist in 2000, was made violently ill by eating spoiled mushrooms. When he suffered the rib injury into the run-up to the new date, he contemplated a further delay of the fight, but in the end decided to go through with it. This decision looked foolhardy as he came under heavy bombardment in the middle rounds, appearing to be on the verge of a stoppage defeat.

"I gave my all tonight. It was just my heart that kept me going," he reflected in his dressing room. "My preparations were not ideal due to the rib injury, but I fought hard and I won. I showed I'm not only a good boxer, but I also have a lot of heart."

The judges' scorecards showed exactly how close he had come to losing his title and unbeaten record. Regarded by some as the leading threat in the division to Antonio Tarver, he had to dig deep to come through a mid-rounds crisis and swing the fight in the late rounds. Even then he was just one point ahead in the eyes of Chuck Giampa (USA) and Cesar Ramos (Puerto Rico), both of who had it 105-104 entering the 12th. Axel Zielke (Germany) had him slightly further ahead at 106-103, but there is no question that Erdei had it all to do going into the most important three minutes of his career—and he did.

"There was a point where I wasn't sure that I would reach the final bell," he admitted. "That's why I'm so proud of my performance. It was a spectacular finish, and it had to be."

Sahnoune, a former WBA light heavyweight titleholder, seized the initiative early, making the most of his superiority in power, taking the fight to Erdei and forcing him to give ground. But the 30-year-old Hungarian regained his composure and boxed well between the second and fifth rounds. Round five, however, was another turning point, seemingly decisively. Sahnoune began to beat Erdei to the punch and, demonstrating his power, hurt the Hungarian badly, especially in the sixth round, which was by far Erdei's worst.

"From that point on I believed in my victory until the very end," said Sahnoune, 29. "Unfortunately, it just wasn't enough."

Displaying reserves of character that his skills had rendered unnecessary before this in his career, Erdei turned the fight again in the 10th. He punched right with Sahnoune until finally the Frenchman cracked. The 10th and 11th were important rounds for Erdei, and in the final round, he backed Sahnoune into a corner and unleashed a dozen unanswered punches before referee Joe Cortez (USA) intervened at the 2:17 mark, bringing the 3,000 fans to their feet.

"I'll fight anyone because I believe I'm the best light heavyweight in the world," said Erdei. On this evidence, he may be the gutsiest. His record improved to 23-0 (14), while Sahnoune fell to 32-2 (27).

Promoter: **Universum-Box**
(10-22-05)
Brian Doogan

Tomasz Adamek KO 6 Thomas Ulrich

Dusseldorf, Germany: Adamek, 174¾, Zywiec, Poland, had to work for his first alphabet title defense, but relatively speaking, it was a much easier night than when he won the title. Having won the vacant WBC light heavyweight title by majority decision in a bloody thriller against Australia's Paul Briggs in May, the Pole made his first defense on German soil against a German fighter, Ulrich, 174¾, Berlin, Germany, who gave everything he had—though ultimately this was not enough. The 4,000 fans in attendance at the Mehrzweckhalle Sud were disappointed not to witness the kind of crowning moment for one of their fighters that the likes of Henry Maske, Sven Ottke, and Graciano Rocchigiani had enjoyed previously.

Adamek was just too good, though his challenger had good pedigree. Ulrich had beaten former titleholder Rocchigiani as well as prominent contender Silvio Branco of Italy. The only fighter he had previously

PHOTO BY JEN SCHUETER/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Erdei rams a right into Sahnoune during hard-earned victory

lost to, Glen Johnson, went on to become world light heavyweight champion. The 28-year-old Pole's ambition is to climb to that same level, and he showed enough against Ulrich to suggest that he should not be discounted.

There was nothing Ulrich, 28-2 (19), could do that Adamek, 30-0 (21), was unable to counter. The fast pace, the high volume of blows, the solid shots that the German got through with, nothing could deter the Pole from asserting his authority throughout. Indeed, it was the challenger who initiated the early assaults, ripping in an overhand right in the first followed by a left hook, punches that excited the locals a lot more than they did Adamek. But the Pole hit back with a barrage of hooks that forced Ulrich, 30, to give ground and won him the round in methodical fashion.

PHOTO BY MARTIN ROSE/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

Adamek (right) stays unbeaten with kayo of Ulrich

Ulrich got cut in the second over his left eye, but did enough to take the round before he was stunned in the third by a left hook. He kept up the pressure, however, and not for a moment was Adamek afforded the luxury of being able to relax. The German continued to be the aggressor, but the cool Pole was content to pick his opponent off with precision, even though his jab stopped being a commanding weapon in the fourth and fifth rounds.

The end came swiftly in the sixth. A left hook early on and a hard left-right combination encouraged Ulrich, though the blood seeping from the wound over his eye must have been a concern. Purposefully, he went on the attack, but Adamek slipped the shots and countered conclusively with a heavy right hand that landed hard on the German's jaw. He landed heavily, flat on his back, and managed to prop himself up into a seated position. But he could not beat the 10-count of English referee Ian John-Lewis, who waved it over at the 1:57 mark.

Promoters: **Universum-Box, Don King Productions**
(10-15-05)
Brian Doogan

David Tua W 10 Cisse Salif

Hollywood, Florida: In the second fight of his comeback following a two-year layoff, Tua performed about the way you might expect. In his prime and at his sharpest, Tua would probably have dispatched an opponent like Salif with ease. On his worst night and at his absolute rustiest, Tua might have eaten jabs all night, gotten outworked, and lost a shocker. The actual result was somewhere in between the two, as the Samoan struggled to get off for seven fairly close rounds, then found his groove from the eighth through 10th to pull out a split decision in the main event of a low-priced pay-per-view card from the Seminole Hard Rock Casino.

Salif, 263, New York, New York, via Mali, held a seven-inch height advantage over the 5'9½" Tua, and he did reasonably well in the early stages of the fight scoring with his left jab. Tua, 245, Auckland, New Zealand, scored occasionally with his looping overhand right—and "occasionally" did enough to carry some of the rounds, many of which had the crowd booing—but he was struggling to cut off the ring and land the clean powershots that often spell his opponents' demise. After seven rounds, it was conceivable to have Salif, 34, holding a slight lead.

But in the eighth, Tua, 32, started employing a strategy he should have turned to much earlier: targeting the body. The Tuaman's lefts and rights to the flanks hurt Salif, 17-5-2 (16), on several occasions in the last three rounds, all of which were more exciting than the seven that preceded them. With 20 seconds left in the fight, Tua, 44-3-1 (38), finally hurt Salif with a hook to the head, and wobbled him even worse with a combination moments later, but the underdog showed a solid chin (he's only been stopped once in his career) and refused to go down.

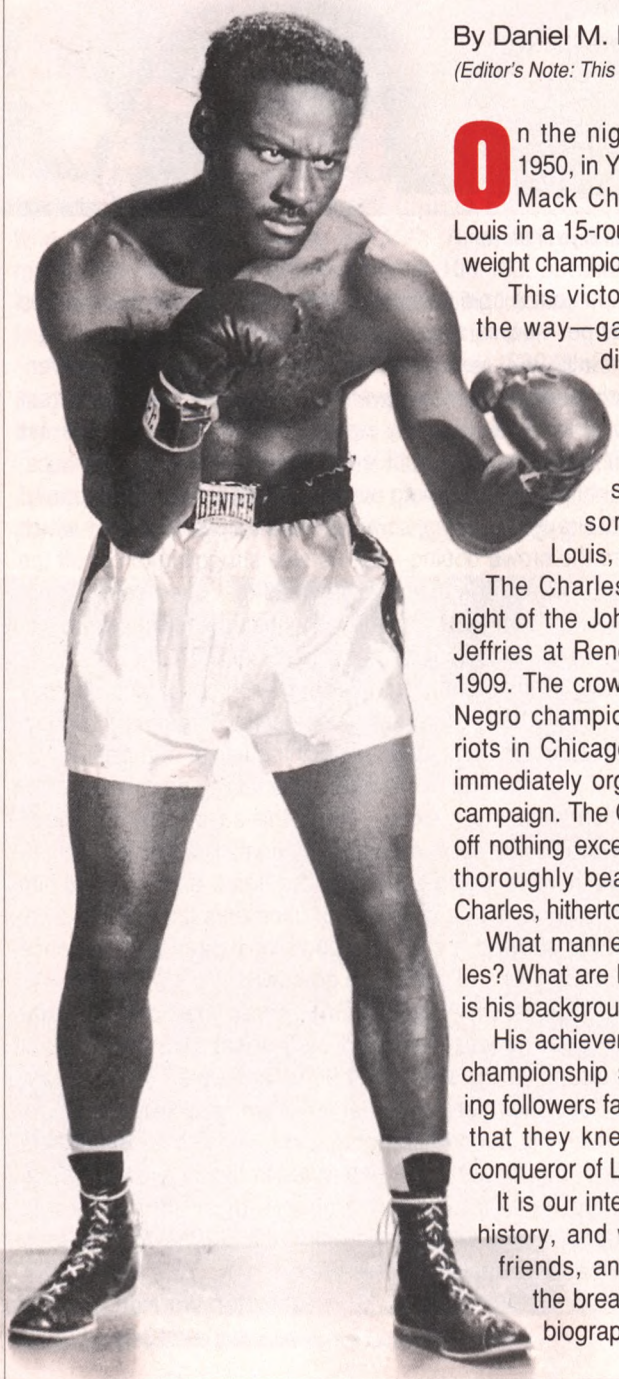
Judge Rocky Young (USA) scored the bout 96-94 for Salif, but he was overruled by Bill Ray (USA) and Mark Streisand (USA), who had it 96-94 and 98-92, respectively, for Tua. The referee was James Warring (USA).

With his second comeback win under his belt, there's talk of the former world heavyweight title challenger taking a step up to top-10 competition with an intriguing fight against Calvin Brock in January, though the fight was far from a done deal as of press time.

Promoter: **Warriors Boxing**
(10-21-2005) ■

From THE RING, January 1951

Ezz's Personality Story Stresses His Humility



By Daniel M. Daniels

(Editor's Note: This is a condensed version.)

On the night of September 27, 1950, in Yankee Stadium, Ezzard Mack Charles outpointed Joe Louis in a 15-round bout for the heavyweight championship of the world.

This victory—an easy one, by the way—gave the heavyweight division its third Negro champion, and for the first time, its second Negro titleholder in succession. Jack Johnson was the first, and Louis, of course, the second.

The Charles victory recalled the night of the Johnson knockout of Jim Jeffries at Reno, Nevada, on July 4, 1909. The crowning of an undisputed Negro champion touched off bloody riots in Chicago and New York, and immediately organized a White Hope campaign. The Charles victory touched off nothing except sympathy for Louis, thoroughly beaten, and acclaim for Charles, hitherto underrated.

What manner of man is this Charles? What are his antecedents? What is his background?

His achievement of the undisputed championship suddenly brought boxing followers face to face with the fact that they knew so little about this conqueror of Louis.

It is our intention to trace Charles' history, and with the aid of family, friends, and neighbors, to fill in the breaks in his more intimate biography.

Charles just had whipped Louis. A onetime errand boy had become undisputed king of all the pugilists from Jacobs Beach to Tierra Del Fuego, from Sydney to London.

Louis, with his face puffed and an eye closed, thoroughly beaten and undoubtedly suffering from shock, since he never could have foreseen so total an eclipse—ignored pleas to come to the microphone and say something about what had happened. His refusal was not hard to understand.

Charles, on the other hand—not unmarked himself, jubilant—was truly humble in the face of his strident achievement. Speaking into the microphone, Charles said, "I'd like to give thanks to God for giving me the strength and courage to win the fight, and since I won the championship, I feel very proud about it. I'll try, and do my best, to keep it as clean as the previous fellow who just stepped down."

Millions of people who had no particular interest in pugilism— Mrs. Sven Olsen in Minnesota, Mrs. Smith down in the Louisiana cane brakes; John Jones on his farm north of Albany; the plain people of America—heard Charles deliver this complete and highly articulate commentary on his victory. They were impressed.

"Here is a fighter, who just has won the world championship, and the first thing he thinks about is to give thanks to his Maker, for the spirit and the courage which gave him the victory," they said. And the effect was marvelous.

Charles had good reason to be thankful. He was especially cognizant

of assistance from a kindly and supervising Providence because, prior to his victory over Freddy Beshore, not so long before the Louis engagement, Ezzard was sidelined for months with an injury to the heart muscle.

For weeks, it was a question whether Charles ever would fight again. But the injury, suffered in training, healed. Charles went on to triumph over Louis, and now we have before us one of the most dramatic success stories in the history of the ring.

In beating Louis, Charles had trounced his idol. As Ezzard, starting as a featherweight in amateur competition while he still was in grammar school, fought his way up, slowly, gradually, the man to whom he looked for inspiration, for high incentive, was Joe Louis.

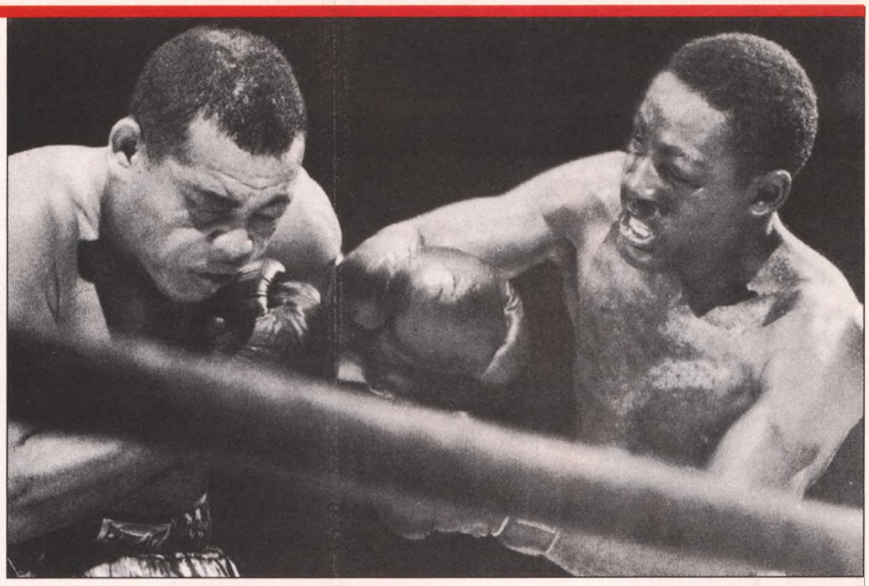
Now champion Charles says, "Bring them on. I will fight anybody with a chance."

And faded Louis says, "I believe I will take on Cesar Brion." The motion pictures of Joe's meeting with Charles shout, "Quit, you have had enough. You are through." But Louis hears not the shouting for the din of his financial troubles, and possibly, too, his battered ego.

Charles' achievement of the title was not just a thing that happened. It was the consummation of a long campaign. Ezzard had mapped it years before he beat Jersey Joe Walcott, and made the wise men of the East give him closer examination.

Charles is not what you would call a flamboyant fighter. No man to knock out a Max Schmeling in one round, for example. But Ezzard is a methodical, highly ambitious, determined boxer, with a brighter offensive flair than he generally is credited with, and a defensive system that defied even the cunning of the faded Louis. Ezz is a thoroughly sound technician.

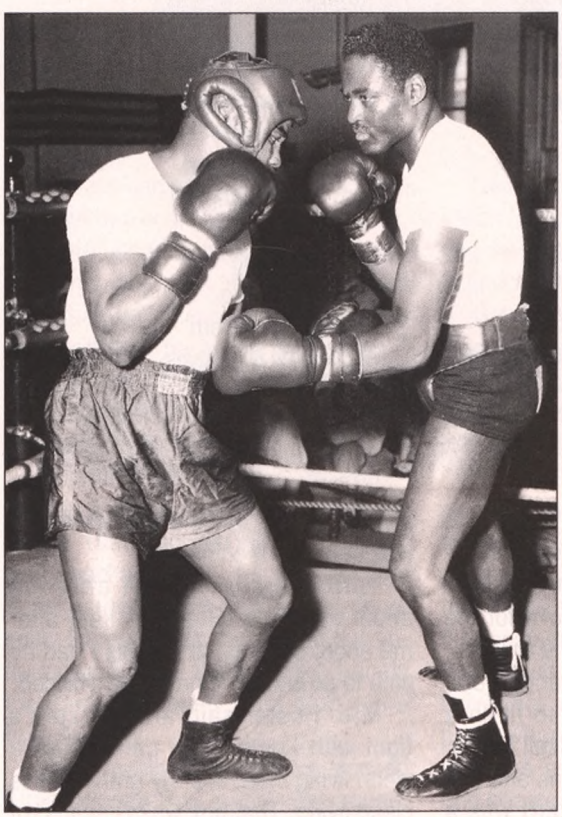
From time to time, boxing is regaled with spurious "students" of the Bible, and phony budding "evangelists." Charles' interest in the Good Book, Charles' history as a churchgoer, are authentic. His religious bent has had much more to do with his ring success than his biographers have appreciated. In short, Ezzard Mack Charles is a very humble man, and genuinely and sincerely so.



Ezzard Charles made easy work of aged legend Joe Louis to become only the third African-American to win the heavyweight championship. It also marked the first time in heavyweight history when one black man succeeded another as heavyweight champion.

Charles was born at Lawrenceville, Georgia, on July 7, 1921. You will find no bronze plaque commemorating the event on the shack in which it happened. There are some 2,700 folks in Lawrenceville, and there were lots fewer 29 years ago.

Where did he get the name Ezzard? He explains "The doctor who brought me into the world was Webster Pierce Ezzard. My mom thought a lot of him, so Ezzard I was named. The Mack for a middle name? That came from my grandpa. I stopped using the Mack part in school. Too much trouble writing it."



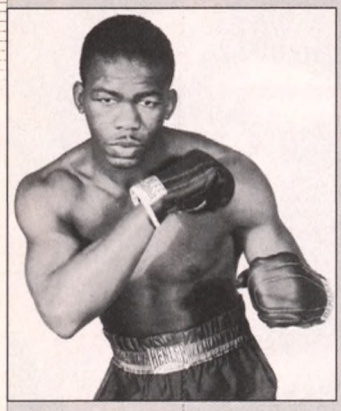
Prior to the Louis fight, there were doubts as to whether Charles ever would fight again due to a training injury. Once healed, however, Charles went on to beat Louis to climax a long, hard climb to the top.

The marriage that produced Ezzard Charles was not a family success. When the boxer was only nine, William Charles, his father, a truck driver, decided to move on. He now is superintendent of an apartment house in Lorain, Ohio.

Mrs. Alberta Charles moved to New York and got a job in a dressmaking establishment. Later she married a man named Moss. She still makes her home in the Big Town.

His father gone one way, his mother gone another, Ezzard came to Cincinnati to live with Mrs. Maude Foster, his grandmother, and Mrs. Belle Russell, his great-grand-

THE RING Ratings, January 1951



Ike Williams

Heavyweights
World Champ: **Ezzard Charles**
1. Joe Louis
2. Lee Savold
3. Joe Walcott
4. Joey Maxim
5. Lee Oma
6. Bob Baker
7. Clarence Henry
8. Omelio Agramonte
9. Rocky Marciano
10. Jack Gardner

Light Heavyweights
World Champ: **Joey Maxim**
1. Archie Moore
2. Harry Matthews
3. Bob Murphy
4. Bob Satterfield
5. Jimmy Slade
6. Nick Barone
7. Doc Williams
8. Connie Rux
9. Don Cockell
10. Willi Hoepner

Middleweights
World Champ: **Jake LaMotta**
1. Ray Robinson
2. Laurent Dauthuille
3. Dave Sands
4. Randolph Turpin
5. Robert Villemain
6. Ray Barnes
7. Gene Hairston
8. Art Towne
9. Rocky Graziano
10. Ronnie Delaney

Welterweights
World Champ: **Ray Robinson**
1. Eddie Thomas
2. George Costner
3. Billy Graham
4. Charley Fusari
5. Lester Felton
6. Johnny Saxton
7. Kid Gavilan
8. Mickey Tollis
9. Charley Cotton
10. Joe Miceli

Lightweights
World Champ: **Ike Williams**
1. John L. Davis
2. Freddie Dawson
3. Tommy Campbell
4. James Carter
5. Arthur King
6. Eddie Chavez
7. Roberto Proietti
8. Johnny Gonsalves
9. Mario Trigo
10. Art Aragon

Featherweights
World Champ: **Sandy Saddler**
1. Willie Pep
2. Charley Riley
3. Ray Famechon
4. Percy Bassett
5. Ronnie Clayton
6. Al Phillips
7. Luis de Santiago
8. Rocky McKay
9. Ciro Morasen
10. Henry Davis

Bantamweights
World Champ: **Vic Toweel**
1. Luis Romero
2. Manuel Ortiz
3. Luis Galvani
4. Luis Castillo
5. Elley Bennett
6. Peter Keenan
7. Gianni Zuddas
8. Tommy Proffitt
9. Bobby Boland
10. Marcel Mathieu

Flyweights
World Champ: **Dado Marino**
1. Jean Sneyers
2. Terry Allen
3. Louis Skena
4. Vic Herman
5. Honore Pratesi
6. Dickie O'Sullivan
7. Stumpy Butwell
8. Teddy Gardner
9. Black Pico
10. Bob Scrivano

mother. Mrs. Foster now is 65, and Mrs. Russell, former slave, is 90. It was Mrs. Russell who had much to do with instilling in Ezzard a love for the Bible, and a kind word for the church.

Mrs. Foster did not exactly need the nine-year-old Ezzard to fill in a quorum in the Foster-Russell home. Maude already had five sons and two daughters. However, Ezzard was a likeable, well-behaved, quiet cuss, and another mouth to feed didn't mean too much. Ezzard had had a younger sister, but she died when she was only four months old.

"Great Grandma kept after me about the Bible, Grandma kept after me about praying, so I guess I had no time to go wrong," Charles reminisced.

Mrs. Foster said after Ezzard's fight with Louis, "You can't scare a clean living man, and my grandchild is clean living. That boy wasn't scared of anything because he got courage from clean living."

When Charles returned from his victory over Louis, he got a public reception in Cincinnati. It was quite a riot. Noisy, thousands of celebrants, and Ezzard impressed with the fact that this near-southern city had turned out for him.

"It does me proud to know that you are happy over my victory," Charles said from the steps of the City Hall, where he had arrived in an open car covered with flowers. Mayor Albert Cash had received him.

"There is no other land where a

Alberta Moss, Charles' mother, gives her son encouragement during a break in training. After Charles' parents split up, he was raised in Cincinnati by Mrs. Maude Foster, his grandmother, and Mrs. Belle Russell, his great-grandmother.

Negro could get the reception I have had from you," Charles concluded.

One of Charles' early "owners" was Max Elkus, a Cincinnati merchant. When he died, he left a 50 percent interest in the fighter to his son Gene, who sold it.

Gene said, "I first saw Ezzard Charles in my dad's store. He used to run incessantly up and down the stairs. Said it strengthened his legs.

"Even after he had made his place in the ring, he was not above lending us a hand during the Christmas and Easter rushes. He would help sell, and never accepted a dollar."

To which Charles said, "I owe a lot to the Elkus family. They gave me jobs when other people would give me nothing, not even the time of day."

Charles made his first big mark as an amateur in the Chicago Golden Gloves in 1939 as a middleweight. Five years earlier, Joe Louis had won the light heavy title in that tournament.

In '40, Charles decided to turn professional. He talks little about things from then on. There was a time when it looked as if he would give up on a fight career, and that was in 1948, after the death of Sam Baroudi of Akron following a contest with Charles.

Charles fought Baroudi on February 20, 1948, in the Chicago Stadium. In the 10th and last round, Baroudi was knocked down—for the first time in his career, it was said. A few hours later, Baroudi was dead. Charles announced that he would fight a benefit for Baroudi's family, and then retire from the ring.

Three months later, Charles stopped Elmer Violent Ray in the ninth round, avenging an earlier defeat by that heavyweight. Out of that night's purse, Charles donated $5,000 to Baroudi's family.

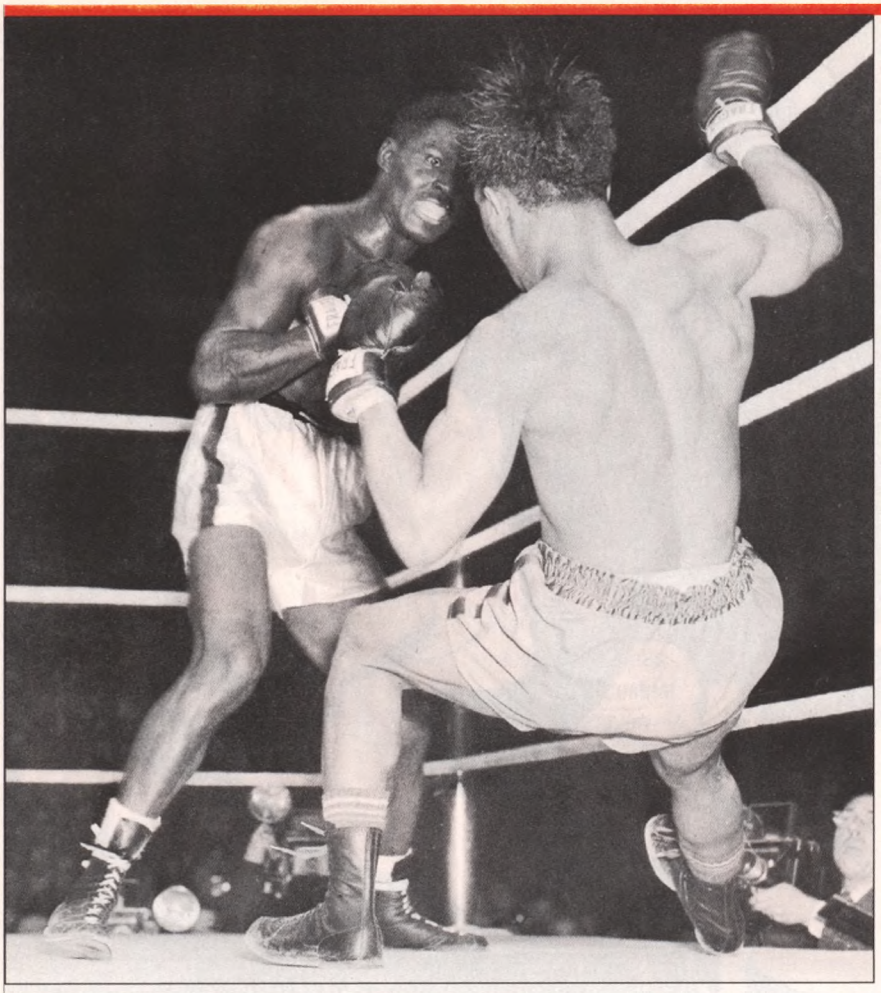
"No one ever will know how difficult it was for me to go back into that same ring with Ray, how tough it was for me to knock him out," said Charles.

Reverend Robert G. Morris, who was Charles' pastor in Cincinnati and now has a church in Chicago, had much to do with inducing Charles to go on with his ring career.

"Ezzard was heart-broken over the accident and was determined not to fight again," Reverend Morris said. "We prayed for his peace of mind. I told him that it was an accident, part of the profession he had chosen for himself."

Charles lives at 929 Lincoln Park Drive, not far from the Cincinnati ballpark, where he goes every time the Dodgers are in town. He is a friend and booster of Jackie Robinson.

Number 929 is a three-story brick structure. Two grandmothers, two aunts, four cocker spaniels, and a



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couple of bass fiddles, for which he paid $375 and $125.

Charles also owns a tenement on Blair Street, has an interest in a business, and owns the gymnasium at Clark and Central Streets, which he opened some time ago, with an investment of $10,000.

Said Charles about money and such, "I am about the poorest heavyweight champion, financially, the game has seen in years and years. On my way up, I never made much. Then there was that sports arena which I owned. While I was away in the service, they piled up $8,000 of unpaid amusement taxes on me, and on my return, I had to start paying that off. I sold the arena, but the debt hung on. I still owe three grand. I had some war bonds put away, but the tax debt swallowed them up.

"Now I am the champion. What a relief to be the undisputed titleholder. Not to read aspersions on your title, not to hear folks refer to you as a dime store champion," Charles exuberated.

Charles had many interests outside of boxing, including playing the bass fiddle. The heavyweight champ also enjoyed reading and rooting for his favorite baseball team, the Brooklyn Dodgers. He gave up hunting after serving in U.S. Army.

"I plan to fight as often as possible, because, for one thing, I've got to cash in on the title. I do not dislike training, the way some other fighters do. When you are in training, you feel better. You are not listless, you don't get up groggy. The way for a fighter to get along is to fight. You have to keep practicing, no matter what your profession, and if you get rusty, you aren't much good.

"Besides, being a champion is expensive. You have to do things you did not do before. Tips here, tips there. Folks expect you to live up to the title.

"You know, all the time I was coming up, I felt that I was being trailed by the shadow of Joe Louis. He made a tremendous record; I would like to match it. Before my match with Louis, I regarded him as my model, my friend. Later, I had to look upon him as my opponent. What did he say to me during the fight? Nothing. Neither did I say anything to him. There just was nothing to talk about in those 15 rounds."

Charles served in Italy during the war and on his return to Cincinnati hired Jimmy Brown, one-time boxer, to train him.

A visit to the Charles ménage is interesting. No magnificent room for the champion of the world. A color photograph of Joe Louis, a few books; among them *Championship Fighting*, by Jack Dempsey, *Freud And His Times*, and *The Heavyweight Championship*, by his friend, Nat Fleischer, Editor of THE RING.

On the dresser a baseball autographed by the Pirates and Jackie Robinson, a pair of boxing gloves that would fit a child of six, a key to the city of Pittsburgh, a few photographs, telegrams, letters.

The closet contains 25 suits of clothes, about as many hats and caps, almost as many pairs of shoes. The Charles wardrobe runs to subdued colors, orthodox patterns.

About Freud, Charles said, "I regret my failure to have gone to college. Somebody told me about Freud, psy-

THE RING, January 1951

The Cover: THE RING brought a case of season's beatings to its fans with this classic illustration of John L. Sullivan, the Boston strongman who was the first heavyweight world champion under the Marquees of Queensbury rules. Oddly enough, there was no article pertaining to Sullivan in this issue.

Root Roots For Old School Fighters: Former light heavyweight champion Jack Root sat down with RING editor Nat Fleischer and expressed his opinion on the fighters of the early-1950s, stating that James Jeffries, Bob Fitzsimmons, Harry Greb, and Benny Leonard would have been able to lick any fighter from any era. But Root did feel that Joe Louis was second among all-time heavyweights.

Irish Eyes On Maxim: Bob "Irish" Murphy was tearing through the light heavyweight ranks, looking for a chance to meet champion Joey Maxim. Murphy's rugged past led to boxing, when he was tapped on the shoulder to compete in a tournament while in the Navy. As a pro, the southpaw with power in both hands had chalked up 51 wins in 54 fights, including 46 knockouts.

Perennial Challenger: Jersey Joe Walcott was still very much feared among his heavyweight contemporaries and yearned for another crack at the title. His bloody battering of Hein Ten Hoff in Germany (pictured, left) had helped keep him in the title picture.

Fighter Of The Month: Sugar Ray Robinson, the welterweight champion of the world, where many believe he was at his best, ran through Hawaiian Carl "Bobo" Olson in 12 rounds, knocked Joe Rindone cold in six, and then finished up a 30-day spree when he whipped Bobby Dykes in 10.

choanalysis, and hypnotism. I don't plan to use that stuff in the ring. Just my two fists."

Charles is no glutton at the table. But neither is he a picky eater.

"I like steak and potatoes, beef and potato pie, and about anything but pork and greens," he explained. "Lots of guys put on about their eating. I—well, just feed me, but good, and that's okay with me.

"Hobbies? Well, I like baseball. Played it a lot as a kid, but had no baseball ambitions. That was before Jackie Robinson was signed by Brooklyn. I never figured we would have Negro players in the Major Leagues. Now—Jackie and Doby, Newcombe, Bankhead, Campanella, Jethroe, Irvin, Thompson, Wilson, Noble—oh, I don't know how many more. Yes, sir, this is a great country.

"I used to do a lot of fishing and hunting. Well, the hunting stopped when I got into the Army and the fishing now is—well, the word is sporadic, I believe. Am I going to move into New York or Chicago? No. I like it here in Cincinnati.

"I have come up the hard way. I appreciate the value of a dollar. Why go around tossing dough down the drain in the big cities? I don't aim to make an impression. You see, now I am the champion."

Charles has done some fooling around with oil paints. For the Urban League benefit in New York last year, he did a picture which brought as much as $650.

Jake Mintz, the Shakespeare scholar who manages Charles, would emit a volume on the subject of the new champion, if time were available to the listener. Boiled down, and translated into working English, Jake's comments on Charles come to this:

"Don't worry about this guy. He is a great champion, and a levelheaded citizen. Believe me, the heavyweight championship of the world never was in better hands. Joe Louis was a wonderful champion, and he went out like the great guy he is. Charles came in like a wonderful champion. If the welfare of the boxing game depends on the character and caliber of the heavyweight titleholder, we are in for some golden years."

Interviewing Charles is not easy because, for one thing, his title is freshly acquired, and perhaps he still is resentful about the skepticism that prevailed concerning his fistic quality before he disposed of Louis.

Charles lacks the demonstrative quality of Jack Dempsey, but eventually he doubtless will be easier to talk to than Joe Louis was as the king of the ring. The boxing public believes Charles to be a real champion, a sincere man who will stick to the straight line marked out by Joe.

The late Jimmy Walker once said, at a dinner of the Boxing Writers' Association of New York, that Louis had laid a rose on Abe Lincoln's grave.

"I don't expect Charles to place flowers on any graves, but I don't expect him to be any the less appreciative of the things Abe did for him, and of the glory of the good old U.S.A."

Jake Mintz put it well. The title is in good hands. ■

(Continued from Page 30)

"That's the attitude that I have, win at all costs, get there," Sechew said. "If I have to box to win, I'll box. If I have to slug to win, I'll slug. Like my dad was determined to get us to the gym that day, that's how determined I am to be a world champion.

"I saw that accident as a sign telling me that as long as I'm doing this boxing thing, I can't quit. I got my first boxing lesson even before I got to the gym. That was kind of strange. My dad pulled the car to the side of the road and said 'Let's go to the gym,' as if nothing happened. It's a thing that when you're young, some kids might say they want to be firemen, policemen, but I always wanted to be a fighter. I am what I always wanted to be. To me, this has been a blessing, because here I am today as a professional fighter and living the way I want to live. It might sound stale, but if you put your whole drive into something, you can do it."

Powell certainly has the right team around him to make it happen. He's promoted by Lou DiBella and co-trained by Francisco Guzman and Al Mitchell. "Iron Horse" has already appeared four times on Showtime's *ShoBox*, with quite possibly a *ShoBox*-record fifth appearance sometime in early-2006. He's no longer the hesitant southpaw who struggled and was knocked down for the first time in his career against tough journeyman Grady Brewer in his 13th fight, surviving a fifth-round knockdown, to win a split decision. Powell has become more patient, more tactical.

Steve Farhood, *ShoBox* color analyst, has seen Powell fight a number of times over the last three years. He's watched Powell mature into a confident fighter. Perhaps that development was best demonstrated in his 10-round decision over hard-punching Archak TerMeliksetian.

"The Archak fight was a step up and a dangerous step up for Sechew, since he was supposed to have a suspect chin," Farhood said. "He's shown me poise, maturity, patience. He's taking what the opponents give him. That wasn't necessarily the case when we had him earlier in his career. He's become a very technically sound fighter. I think in a year, I can see him as a contender.

"Sechew's a grounded kid who doesn't talk a lot of smack. As he continues to improve, his competition has been stronger, but I believe he'll continue to progress. He keeps improving in all the intangibles. That's just maturity. I give him credit for becoming a real pro. That's something I might not have said about him two years ago."

That's because Powell relied more on his physical tools than honing his hand speed and boxing skills through hard work.

"I'd have say that it's mostly true," Powell admitted. "Before I used to box on just talent and win a lot of fights on that. I was going up against sub-par opposition. But when I fought Grady Brewer, I was dropped in the fifth round and it was the first time in my life that I was ever dropped. That was my fault. I didn't prepare properly. I was seeing my old lady, I wasn't training the way I should have been. I hardly did any roadwork. I came to the gym and did what I wanted to do.

"My father was disappointed by the way I was training, but what could he do, what could anyone have done? Ultimately, I was the guy entering the ring. I learned a big lesson against Brewer. To a certain extent, the Brewer fight humbled me."

After getting by Brewer, Powell went on to win five straight, including a memorable clash with Cornelius Bundrage, when both fighters hit each other at the same time, creating a simultaneous knockdown. But it was Powell who had the superior recuperative powers and got back up to finish Bundrage.

Against TerMeliksetian, Powell's biggest test to date, DiBella liked what he saw.

"I was incredibly impressed by Sechew's performance for a few reasons," DiBella said. "He fought a puncher with a brilliant style, and I was also amazed by Sechew's composure. I think his progress has been steady. Archak was a perfect test. He was as tough as nails and he can punch. Sechew learned a lot about himself in the fight."

"We think Sechew is one fight away from breaking into the top 10, and then his next fight is a championship fight," Mitchell said. "Sechew still needs work. I would like to see him use his jab more and I would like to see him more aggressive. But he's stepping around and he shows no fear of anyone. His mind is now more inside the ring. He's more focused. In fact, in my opinion, the only thing that can stop Sechew now is Sechew."

Or a telephone pole on a wet road. ■

PHOTO BY TEDDY BLACKBURN

Powell rocks Jamal Harris with a right hook en route to a six-round decision victory in April 2003. If Powell keeps progressing, the southpaw is aiming for a title shot sometime late this year or in early-2007.

On The Move

The saga of two fighters going in different directions

By Joe Santoliquito

Kelly Pavlik/Youngstown, Ohio

Pavlik's keeps passing tests

Kelly Pavlik was tested in his last training camp, as he prepared to take on the biggest challenge of his career—middleweight knockout artist Fulgencio Zuniga. Understand, Pavlik wasn't challenged in the ring when he sparred. His training wasn't pushing him to unknown limits; it's just that sometimes his thoughts were elsewhere.

As Pavlik trained in Las Vegas, his mind was across the country in his hometown of Youngstown, Ohio, thinking about his girlfriend and their baby stirring inside her. The 23-yead-old middleweight is going to be a father for the first time in May and wants to be as supportive as he can throughout the process.

But duty called—and Pavlik responded. He stopped Zuniga (the first time in the Colombian's career) in the ninth round when referee Robert Byrd waved the fight over at the 3:00 mark. It's passing mental challenges like that that could one day help Pavlik, 27-0 (24), win a world championship.

"The last fight getting ready for Zuniga, it was hard being in training camp, knowing my girlfriend was back home pregnant and it was always on my mind," Pavlik said. "It was a good thing, because I got tested a little bit. I love training. I just got homesick being out there in Vegas. It's easy to just say no to training camp and stay home. But I know that's not any good for me. There are a lot of temptations going on and you have people pulling you in a lot of different directions. I needed to be away from home, and being away from home, you get pissed off and you start to get angry. You're like a caged animal by the time fight night comes."

Pavlik, through the guidance of manager Cameron Dunkin and promoter Top Rank, is hoping to fight for a title sometime late this year or in early-2007.

"I'm getting hungrier and hungrier, but we're being patient and listening to what our management is saying," Pavlik said. "The Zuniga fight is the longest I've ever gone in my career. My power is there and I think I'm more mature. I look forward to doing more 12-round fights. Zuniga was there to be hit, but he's still gone 12 rounds three times, and I can use that experience."

"We like the way Kelly is progressing," Dunkin said. "He's a big strong, hard-punching kid. He showed a lot of guts in his last fight. He beat Zuniga at his own game by standing inside and banging him up. He had to fight. We'd like to get Kelly involved in some of an eliminator and we're looking to get him a title fight sometime late this year."

Hussein Hussein/Sydney, Australia

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Hussein flunked his last test

A fighter's skills usually deteriorate little by little, in stages. As they age, reflexes slow, legs weaken, and stamina erodes. Gradually, a super fighter becomes good, a good fighter ordinary, and a mediocre fighter is in serious trouble. Other fighters seem to age virtually overnight, which seems to be the case with Australian flyweight Hussein.

After giving Jorge Arce an extremely tough fight in their first encounter, Hussein suffered a second-round blowout defeat to the hard-charging Mexican in the October rematch. The emphatic defeat knocked Hussein out of THE RING's top 10 flyweights and probably finished him as a viable threat to win a world title.

Most figured the rematch with Arce, on the undercard of Diego Corrales-Jose Castillo II, would be another give-and-take war, but this time Arce did all the giving, while Hussein, 28-3 (21), did all the taking. In retrospect, it seems that the first bout with Arce may have taken most of the fight out of him.

In round one of the rematch, Arce came out working his jab. But he seemed uncharacteristically hesitant, and didn't land a decent punch until the midway point of the round when he connected with a right. Hussein's right, however, was quickly countered by a straight right from Arce that caught him completely by surprise and knocked him down. Hussein appeared to be in control of his senses as he picked himself up off the canvas, but his confidence was gone, and Arce seemed to know it.

Arce attacked, trapping Hussein against the ropes late in the round and dishing out more punishment. During the break, Hussein's trainer, Jeff Fenech, implored his fighter to be more active.

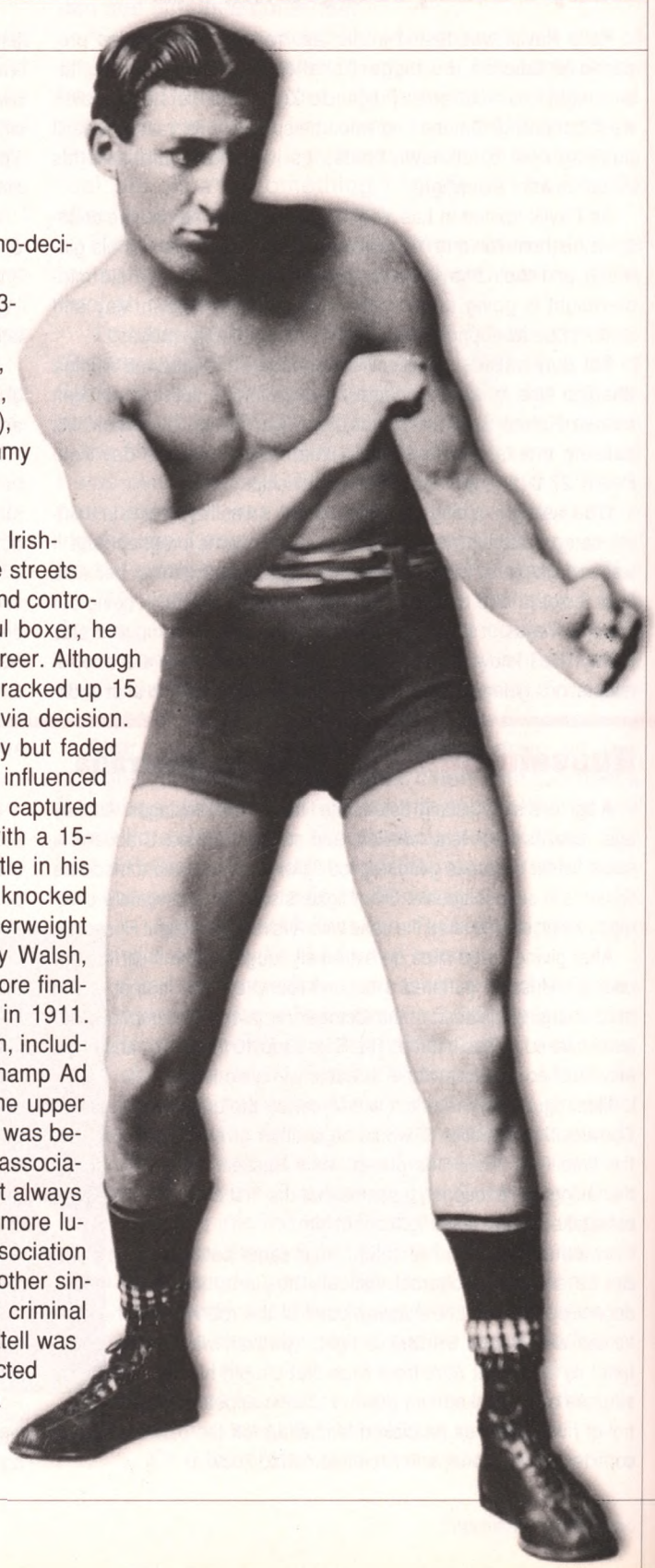
The second round started just like the first. Hussein came out circling and then connected with a straight right to the head. The punch seemed to spur Acre into action, and the Mexican sprang forward, eager to engage. The end came quickly. With Hussein hugging the ropes, Arce dug a left hook to the body that downed Hussein a second time. Feeling his fighter was in danger, Fenech threw in the towel, and referee Kenny Bayless stopped the fight at the 2:50 mark.

Hussein was good, but not good enough to beat the best in the division. Two of his three losses have come against Arce, and the other setback was a one-sided decision defeat in 2003 to Pongsaklek Wongjongkam, THE RING's number-one rated flyweight. Hussein could try to rebuild, but it's tough to rebound at age 30, especially for a flyweight. ■

Hall of Fame Profile

Each issue THE RING will feature a thumbnail biography of a ring great who has received the ultimate honor: induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in Canastota, New York

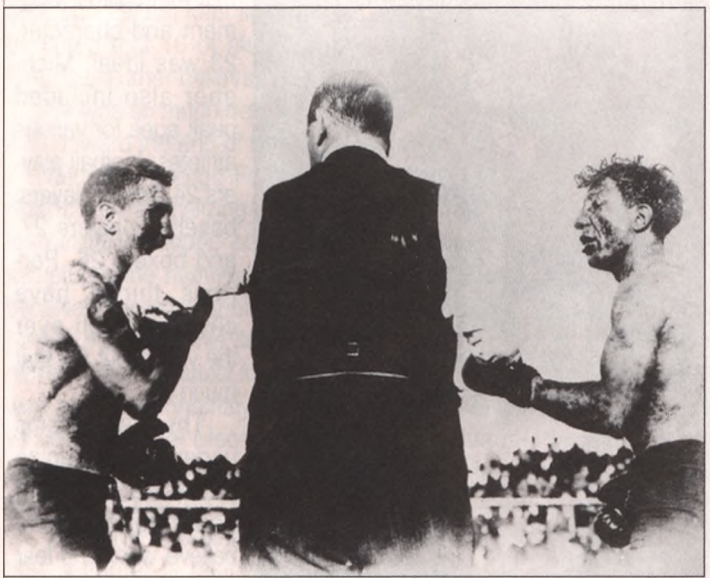
Abe Attell



Nickname: None
Birthdate: February 22, 1884
Birthplace: San Francisco, California
Weight Class: Featherweight
Height: 5'4"
Professional Record: 91-9-18 (53) with 51 no-decisions and 2 no-contests
Titles: World Featherweight (September 3, 1903-October 13, 1904, February 22, 1906-February 22, 1912)
Best Performances: George Dixon (W 15), Johnny Reagan (W 20, W 20), Harry Forbes (KO 5), Jimmy Walsh (W 15, KO 8), Tommy Sullivan (KO 4), Johnny Kilbane (W 10), Battling Nelson (D 15), Tommy Murphy (D 20)
Year of IBHOF Induction: 1990
Background: As a Jew growing up in a tough Irish-American neighborhood, Attell learned to fight on the streets and went on to become one of the most successful and controversial champions in boxing history. A quick, skillful boxer, he turned pro in 1900 following a successful amateur career. Although not considered a particularly deadly puncher, Attell racked up 15 knockouts his rookie year, while winning one bout via decision. The next year, he fought a trilogy with the legendary but faded George Dixon (D 10, D 20, W 15), who Attell claimed influenced him to develop a smoother, more relaxed style. He captured the vacant featherweight championship in 1903 with a 15-round decision over Johnny Reagan, but lost the title in his second defense when "Brooklyn" Tommy Sullivan knocked him out in the fifth round. Attell regained the featherweight crown in 1906 with a 15-round decision over Jimmy Walsh, and proceeded to tally an additional 19 defenses before finally surrendering the title to Johnny Kilbane (L 20) in 1911. Attell also fought many non-title bouts during his reign, including a 10-round no-decision with future lightweight champ Ad Wolgast, in which most newspapers felt Attell had the upper hand, and a 15-round draw with Battling Nelson, who was between lightweight reigns at the time. It was Attell's associations with gamblers and his admission that he did not always do his best in certain bouts (in an effort to secure a more lucrative rematch) that sullied his reputation. Attell's association with organized crime figure Arnold Rothstein cast another sinister shadow over the tiny boxer. Rothstein was the criminal mastermind who fixed the 1919 World Series, and Attell was one of his loyal cohorts. Still, Attell was never convicted of any crime, and after retiring from the ring, ran a successful bar and restaurant for many years. He died on February 7, 1970.

Attell squares off with Harry Baker prior to their featherweight title fight in Los Angeles, which Attell won via eighth-round knockout.

Attell as he looked in 1917 (above), two years before he was involved in the World Series scandal. Back in 1903, Abe was on the cover of ***The National Police Gazette*** *(right), the leading sports publication of the day.*



Referee Jack Welch momentarily separates Attell (right) and "Harlem" Tommy Murphy during their blood-soaked 1912 brawl in San Francisco that ended in a 20-round draw.

Former heavyweight champions Max Baer and Jack Dempsey pose with Attell at a party held in honor of the old featherweight king during the latter stages of his life.

By Margaret Goodman, M.D.

When Is Someone Too Old To Box?

Professional boxers often push their bodies too far for their own medical good. No one can deny that the aging process brings an inevitable decline in physical capabilities. Nevertheless, promoters, networks, and athletic commissions typically turn a blind eye when it comes to chronological age, especially if a boxer is marketable. But is this right, fair, or simply a legal matter?

The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 prohibits discrimination in hiring, promotions, termination, or any other term, condition, or privilege of employment because of a person's age. To avoid the inevitable legal repercussions, commissions never deny a license to box purely on age. Instead, they invoke additional medical testing requirements and attempt to factor in skill. However, time after time, fighters with name cache, such as Tommy Hearns, or aging journeymen, such as the now-deceased Brad Rone, slip through the cracks.

HBO analyst Larry Merchant believes a fighter should be able to fight as long as he can pass a good physical exam.

"It is a murky area," Merchant said. "However, in general, the fans will tell you when they don't want to see you anymore. This is when most guys retire. Jerry Quarry and Bobby Chacon fought well past their peaks until no one would pay to see them."

But does this let-the-fans-decide method make good medicals sense?

"Although fans would follow Arnold Palmer around a golf course until he fell and broke a hip, boxing is not golf," said Dr. Flip Homansky. "A guy with ring age, or any fighter over 35, is more susceptible to acute and chronic injury. No one should fight over the age of 40. Common sense is as valuable as science."

Well-respected trainer Don Turner agrees. "I am a believer that people take freedom and overdo it. The rules should be up by the commission. I see no reason why anyone should fight over 40. This applies to all weight classes. The truth is that no fighter gets better over age 26."

Turner ascribes to the philosophy detailed in James Michener's 1976 book *Sports In America*, in which Michener examines at what age reflexes slow. Studies of statistics on World War II jet fighter pilots discovered their optimal age was close to 17. When you combine that with optimal judgment and character, 23 was ideal. Michener also included peak ages for various athletes: football players 24, tennis players, baseball players 27, and boxers 26. Perhaps things have changed a bit over the years, but not that much.

Sugar Ray Robinson suffered 16 of his 19 defeats after the age of 34

The mechanisms underlying the aging process are not well understood. Some believe wear and tear exceeds the reparative capacity of tissues. Obviously, there

are great individual differences, and there is no satisfactory way to determine a person's true biological age, because our systems age at different rates. Nonetheless, both biological function and physical performance peak between the ages of 20 and 35. On the other hand, in middle-age (35-45), physical activity wanes and body fat accumulates. At ages 45-65, sex hormones reduce significantly in men and women, contributing to performance decline.

Each of our organ systems responds differently to advancing age. For example, age brings with it a decline in the amount of blood the heart can pump, and a decrease in maximum heart rate, both of which limit athletic performance. It also leads to a decline in the ability of the lungs to move oxygen from the air into the bloodstream. Muscle strength peaks around age 25, and thereafter we lose some of the ability to control muscle firing, which leads to a loss of strength and coordination. Blood flow to the brain also declines, which also slows reaction time. Furthermore, the tiny bridging veins that connect the brain to its coverings are definitely more susceptible to rupture in the older boxer. The brain shrinks with age, these veins stretch, and when the head is hit, a subdural hematoma (blood clot) can occur more readily.

Statistically, older athletes are much more likely to injure themselves than their younger counterparts who are competing in the same sport. Musculoskeletal problems and bone density loss are unavoidable. Moreover, flexibility decreases, which results in the knees and shoulders bearing greater stress during exercise. This stress can gradually destroy the joints. One only has to look at the recent retirement of heavyweight champion Vitali Klitschko, after repeated problems with his knee, and James Toney's several fight postponements due to an Achilles' tendon tear, biceps, and triceps rupture to realize how age can adversely affect a fighter.

Whether or not there are exceptions to the rule is a matter of opinion. Sugar Ray Robinson knew he was slipping after age 29, but kept fighting until he was 44. Still, it should be noted that 16 of his 19 defeats occurred after age 34. Even so, Turner believes Robinson was an exception.

"He was so much better than everyone else to begin with, even toward the end of his career," said Turner.

Naturally, George Foreman comes to the mind of every older boxer rationalizing his decision to stay in the spot. Foreman initially stopped boxing at age 28, returned at 38, and recaptured the heavyweight championship at 45. Clearly, he benefited from the lay-off and was blessed with great knockout power. Moreover, his success never depended on speed or movement. I can attest from personal experience that Foreman was a medical anomaly, as I examined him before his 1994 win over Michael Moorer. Remarkably, he had the physical exam of a 25-year-old at age 45. But precious few fighters can expect the same results as Foreman.

"Forty-five is definitely pushing it. I look at the legs and how a fighter is taking shots," said Buddy McGirt, when asked how he evaluates his fighters. "A guy is too old if he can't pull the trigger."

As far as Turner is concerned, reflexes are the key, and they decline with age. Turner is also adamant about what he calls "the weight factor."

PHOTO BY TOM CASINO

Foreman at 45: A total anomaly

"Why can't a fighter fight at the same weight class his whole career?" asked Turner. "It is because he doesn't take care of his body. Instead, he's worried about how much money he is going to make."

Generally speaking, lighter-weight fighters retire at an earlier age.

"Part of this relates to their going up and down in weight," said McGirt. "Speed is more important to the littler guys, and that is tough to maintain with age. However, some guys get smarter as they get older, no matter what the weight class is. James Toney is a good example of a guy who wastes less and less energy [as he ages]."

Age is just another one of those nasty issues we wish would go away. Still, age requirements do exist for many types of licenses. For example, it is a fact that older drivers are at more risk for accidents. As a result, several states have adopted age-based renewal applications for older drivers.

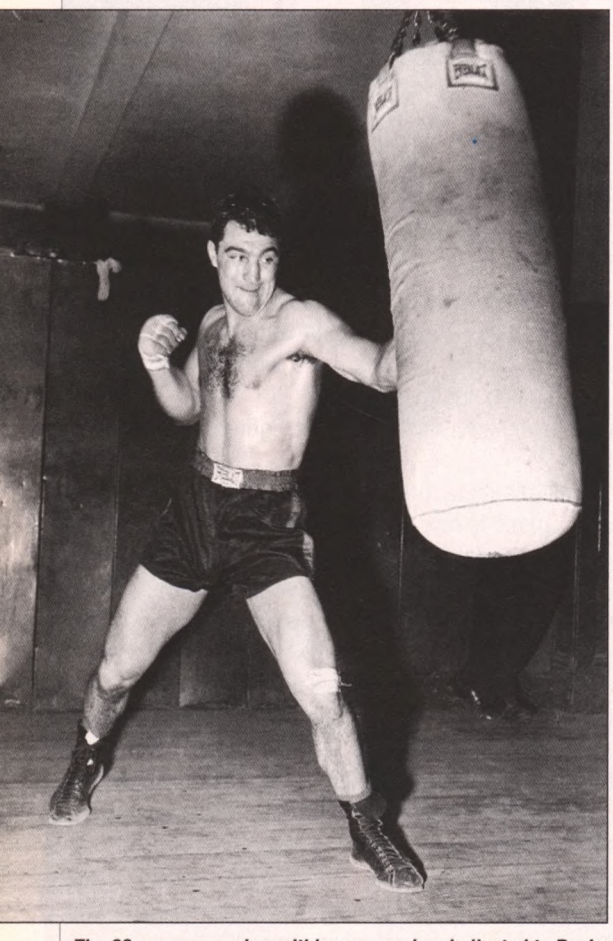
The same holds true for older fighters who are more at risk for acute and chronic injury. While no boxer should be discriminated against from pursuing his career, age if often a factor in medical fitness and decline in skill.

I agree with Dr. Homansky that you don't need an M.D. behind your name or a battery of expensive tests to tell you when a fighter should retire. Common sense is just as important. ■

Come Out Writing

Letters may be edited for reasons of space and clarity. Send your comments to Come Out Writing, THE RING, P.O. Box 1148, Fort Washington, PA 19034.

Or e-mail letters to comeoutwriting@yahoo.com. E-mailed letters will include the writer's e-mail address unless a city and state of origin is provided.



The 62-page magazine-within-a-magazine dedicated to Rocky Marciano (THE RING DOUBLE, Vol. 6, 2005) has proven very popular with readers, including Robert J. Cook and Dr. James Kernodle Jr. Boxing sure could use another champ like The Rock, especially today at a time when the heavyweight division is lacking a dominant figure.

Rocky Still Rules

I read every word of your special tribute to Rocky Marciano (THE RING DOUBLE, Volume 6, 2005). Growing up in the 1950s as a Marciano fan, I well remember the title defenses described in the articles—and the two that were not, the second Walcott and the Don Cockell defenses.

Rating heavyweight champions remind me of the major college football rankings each year. Inevitably, if one team goes unbeaten, it is awarded the number-one spot. Some fans also inevitably argue that other teams could have also finished unbeaten, but only one did. I always like to quote The Rock's record of 49 fights, 49 wins, 43 by knockout. Also, the number of fighters and the caliber of the contenders during the '50s and '60s greatly surpass those of today.

ROBERT J. COOK
Macomb, IL

Thank you for the extra section on Rocky Marciano. It was fantastic. Even though the heavyweight division today is very mediocre, it is still my favorite weight class. If possible, could THE RING show us a timeline of the linear heavyweight champion, going all the way back to the late 1800s to today?

DR. JAMES KERNODLE JR.
jkernodle@triad.rr.com

[Editor's note: The complete lineage of champions and titleholders in all weight classes can be found in THE RING ALMANAC & BOOK OF FACTS. The 2006 edition goes on sale February 14, 2006.]

Boo Byrd

As a hardcore boxing fan, I watched the Chris Byrd-DaVarryl Williamson IBF heavyweight title fight. Why do I torture myself like this? But at least now I know what "IBF" stands for—Immensely Boxing Fighter! After the fight, Chris said, "The fans wanted to see a fight tonight, and I was willing to engage. But I wasn't going to do anything stupid and risk getting knocked out just to make the fans happy." Well, listen here, Chris. If you don't make the fans happy, you get booed. Moreover, you don't get the big fights and you don't get out of Don King's doghouse. This is boxing, and people pay to see action, excitement, and knockouts. The problem isn't Byrd's opponents or King. The problem is that Byrd is boring, dull, and an insult to heavyweight boxing.

RONALD J. EGGLESTON
Detroit, MI

Contender Controversy

Anyone who saw *The Contender* rematch fights on ESPN on October 15 and wasn't offended didn't really see *The Contender* rematch fights on October 15—and can join the judges. The decision giving victory to Jesse Brinkley over Anthony Bonsante was one of the three worst decisions I have ever seen, ranking right up there with Courtney Burton's "win" over Emanuel Augustus and Park Si Hun's gold-medal robbery against Roy Jones. On my scorecard, Brinkley did not win a single round. Bonsante hit him at will, and in several rounds tripled and even quadrupled the number of punches Brinkley landed. For their incompetence, judges Raul Caiz, Fritz Werner, and Julie Lederman should be stripped of their licenses. Moreover, the decision should be overturned.

To further the problem, that gift decision was followed by another questionable call, when Sergio Mora got

PHOTO COURTESY OF ESPN/THE CONTENDER

Jesse Brinkley should be smiling after the gift decision he got over Anthony Bonsante in **The Contender** *rematches. That's the opinion of a lot of folks, including reader Kevin Page, who wrote to voice his outrage.*

the decision over Peter Manfredo Jr. Though less flagrant than Brinkley-Bonsante, it was still a poor decision.

Although this event was inspired by a reality game show, boxing is a sport, and it will not survive if these so-called Contenders continue to lose fights but still get the decision.

KEVIN PAGE
page8701@msn.com

Happy Customer

Just wanted to say how great I thought the recent RING magazine cover featuring Jeff Lacy was (Fall 2005). It was a classic cover, reminiscent of the July 1981 issue of THE RING featuring Matthew Saad Muhammad. I hope to see more covers as simple and as elegant as this, hopefully with a RING world champ wearing his belt. Keep up the great work.

ANDREW WORKMAN
Daytona Beach, FL

Let's See Castillo-Mayweather III

I can't wait to see a third fight between Jose Luis Castillo and Diego Corrales, but I'm kind of worried about Corrales. I still can't believe "Chico" didn't use his height as an advantage. He seems to make the same mistake in every fight. I know Corrales wants to prove he's a warrior, but he can't continue to get hit so much. As far as Castillo is concerned, he's better than I originally thought, and I look forward to watching him fight again. I also think he should have gotten the decision in his first fight with Floyd Mayweather. So why not have Castillo and "Pretty Boy" fight a third time? It's the sort of fight boxing needs.

IVAN MONTIEL
Toronto, Ontario

The New Winky?

Cheers to Ivan Goldman for his "Raheem Upsets Morales" article in THE RING DOUBLE, Volume 6, 2005, and shame on Bob Arum for sweeping Raheem's victory under the carpet. Thank goodness no Magoos were needed, as the fight was scored correctly. Here's hoping that Zahir gets his due and doesn't have to suffer from Winky Wright Syndrome too long.

RALPH SOLOMON
Savannah, GA

Missing Vitali

I traveled to Las Vegas from England to support Danny Williams in his abortive attempt at the world heavyweight championship, and during the weigh-in experienced the worst possible scenario for a fan: I found myself unsure about who I wanted to win—Williams or Vitali Klitschko. The reason for this was that I got to see first-hand just what a great guy Vitali was. He was polite, courteous, and had the aura of champion all over him. He was genuinely impressive. He shook my hand, even though I was wearing my Williams T-shirt. Now that Vitali has hung up his gloves, I lament the retirement of such an honest and admirable fighter.

WAYNE MATTHEWS
Stroud, England ■

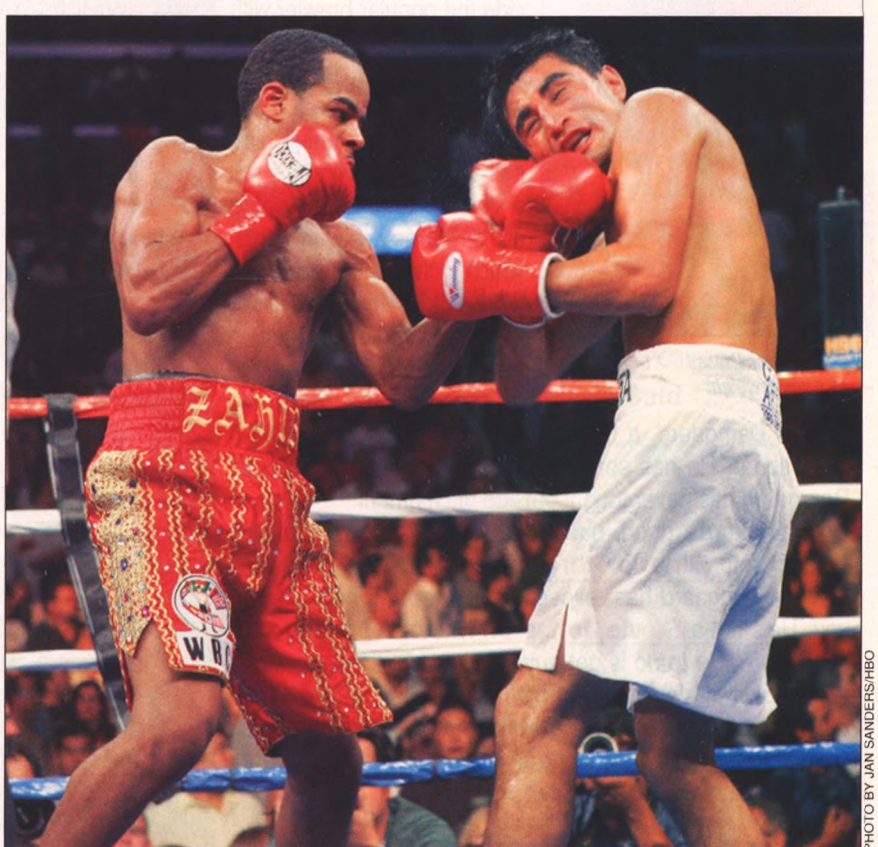


PHOTO BY JAN SANDERS/HBO

Zahir Raheem punishes Erik Morales en route to one of the biggest upsets of 2005. Reader Ralph Solomon worries that the super slick Raheem might be too good for his own good and be avoided the way Winky Wright was for much of his career.

Looking Ahead

By Joe Santoliquito

Gatti Tries Welter ... Again

Arturo Gatti could be scheduled to fight a pigmy and it would still attract a large crowd. It doesn't matter that "Thunder" is coming off a one-sided thumping at the lightning hands of **Floyd Mayweather** in June. It doesn't matter that Gatti was terribly exposed by Mayweather, as most junior welterweights would be. What does matter is that Atlantic City's Boardwalk Hall will be jumping with rabid Gatti fans again on January 28 and HBO is expecting the usual large armchair audience to watch Gatti begin his welterweight campaign against relatively unknown but undefeated, **Thomas Damgaard**.

Gatti, 39-7 (30), is counting on his second venture at 147 to turn out better than his first, which resulted in an awful beating from **Oscar De La Hoya** in March 2001 that ended in a fifth-round TKO defeat. At the time, a lot of people considered the De La Hoya fight kind of a goodwill gesture, calculated to provide the popular brawler with a million-dollar payday before he retired. But Gatti, with the help of trainer **Buddy McGirt**, reinvented himself and has proven he's still a viable attraction, winning six of his next seven fights, which included the epic Gatti-**Micky Ward** trilogy, before meeting Mayweather.

PHOTO BY DUANE LONG

Gatti has resurfaced as a welterweight

As far as U.S. fans are concerned, the unknown here is Damgaard, a Danish southpaw with a glossy 37-0 (27) record. He has some quality wins on his resume, but Damgaard has never fought outside of Denmark.

"Damgaard's good, but not as good as his record indicates," said **Claude Abrams**, editor of *British Boxing News*. "Damgaard has respectable power and he'll go after you. He's not a **Stevie Johnston** kind of southpaw. What he's been able to do is get guys at the right time. He has a fair amount of stoppages on his record, but that might have more to do with clever matchmaking than punching power. Being unbeatable in Denmark is certainly different than being unbeaten in Atlantic City."

Lacy Finally Gets Calzaghe

Jeff Lacy has wanted to get England's **Joe Calzaghe** into the ring so badly that he might have been willing to swim the Atlantic Ocean to make it happen. It looks as if Lacy won't have to go to that extreme, as Calzaghe and Lacy will meet to fill the vacant RING super middleweight world championship.

PHOTO BY TOM CASINO/SHOWTIME

Lacy can't wait to throw some muscle at Calzaghe

As of press time, it was undetermined what the exact date of the fight will be, but **Gary Shaw**, Lacy's promoter, stated it could occur either the first Saturday in February or March. What is certain is that the fight will take place at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff South Wales, Calzaghe's home turf.

"I feel good about this because we have a number of stopgaps in the contract, like a 20-square foot ring, instead of a 22-foot that Calzaghe's people were asking for," Shaw said. "We'll have one judge each from the United States and England, with the third judge from another country. The same goes for the referee, who won't be either American or British. I honestly think Jeff will get a fair shake there. But I don't know kind of security people they have over there to carry those belts back home. We'll need a Brink's truck to haul all of those belts back with us, with Jeff holding up THE RING belt sitting up front."

Another major bonus is that the fight will be shown on subscription Showtime, not pay-per-view.

"We're expecting 30,000 at the stadium, so the place will be rocking," Shaw said. "Having the fight on free Showtime is something Team Lacy wanted to do for fight fans. We were willing to fight for a smaller amount of money than pay-per-view would have provided. I don't discus paydays, but I will say this, Jeff will be making enough money to get his promoter a new watch, and that Jeff has a 32-inch waist to be fitted for that new RING belt."

Listen Up

The Lacy-Calzaghe undercard will certainly feature some intriguing names. Shaw will be bringing over **Ahmed Kaddour** and **Joey Gilbert** from the boxing reality show *The Contender*. "*The Contender* was very popular over in England," Shaw said. "We're going to try to get there three weeks before the fight, so who knows, maybe we can make a few converts of English fans." **Frank Warren**, Calzaghe's promoter, will be countering with his own young gun, Olympic silver medalist **Amir Khan**. ■

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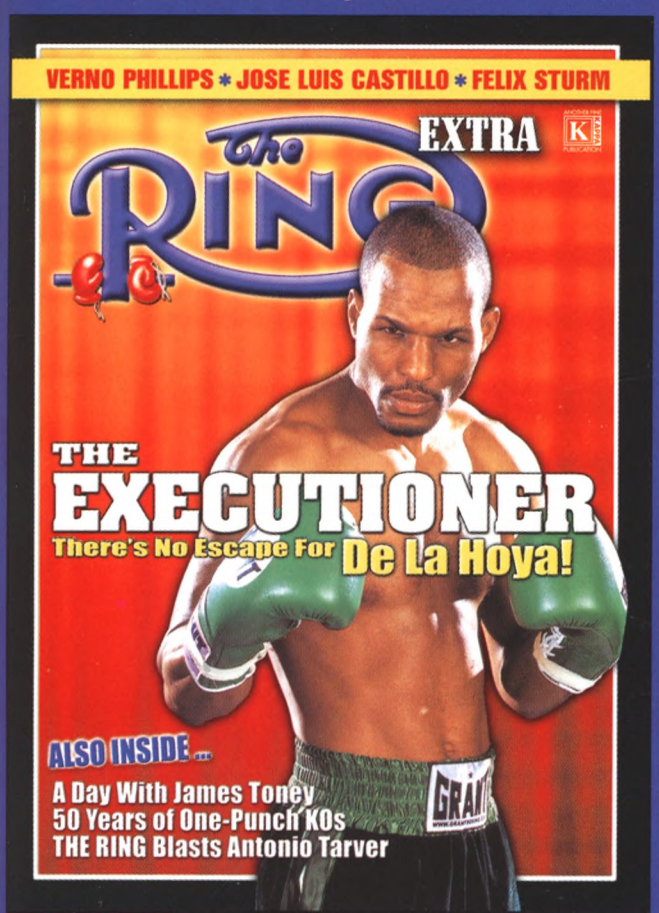

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